

Of Helpful Import...

This story was intended as a prediction of canon, as of the Harry Potterverse before Half-Blood Prince was released. If you've noticed, this e-novel was completed and begun the summer before Book 6 was released. It was heavily researched and discussed, so that virtually all of the events that played out in this work were entirely possible within the Potter realm (again, as of HBP.) Many things, specifically character development, wound up being alarmingly in-line with the way Rowling wrote her own novel.

It contains heavy interaction between some rarely explored characters. As this story's author already loved the universe she was borrowing, it is her way of paying tribute to the genre's creator to flesh out some backgrounds of Potter folk that we don't know much about. Other subject matter includes fully dealing with the controversy-packed topics of bigotry, racism, self-mutilation, revenge, murder, suicide and torture--both psychological and physical.

By so doing, this work involved the writer immersing herself completely into the emotionality of Harry Potter and his mates, their motivations, why Harry rationalises how he does and why he can continue to heal despite everything that happens to him. Sound boring? I assure you it's not--she kills Harry off in the first chapter. Or does she?

This story has been described as a combination of Five People You Meet In Heaven, What Dreams May Come, The Crow, and Harry Potter all rolled into one. Read on to see for yourself, you won't be disappointed...

Harry gets in a fatal car crash with the Dursleys and finds someone framed him for their alleged murders. In this provocative tale of flight, friendship, and fury, he must learn the will to survive and face destiny comes from mind, body, and soul. After all is said and done, with the unfailing support of those you love, you can never truly be alone.

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After wending his way through King's Cross Station, Harry heaved his trunk into the boot of his uncle's car. Thankfully he was able to do this by himself with ease now, as he had grown a nice pair of strong shoulders over the past year. His Uncle Vernon had been in no mood to assist him in transferring his belongings from the trolley anyway. Harry reached for his meticulously swaddled Firebolt and carefully placed it in the boot.

Harry knew his uncle's surly mood was largely due to the "friendly warning" he had just received from his magical friends in the Order of the Phoenix. He sniggered thinking back to the terrified look on his uncle's face as Mad-Eye Moody had exposed his magical eye to him. He would treasure the priceless moment forever.

Dudley, Aunt Petunia, and Uncle Vernon all climbed into the car as Harry slammed the boot lid.

Not wanting to leave Hedwig alone with his creepy relatives, he returned the trolley to the station and carried his owl back out to the car with him.

While he was walking, Harry thought back to the conversation he'd had before leaving all his friends...

Hermione and Ron had both said they would write, and talk to him soon. He had wanted to believe them; however he still wasn't sure if he wanted too regularly of correspondence anyway. Harry sort of just wanted to cocoon up in his room on Privet Drive and not think about anything for awhile. He'd thought entirely too much about everything lately. He even thought about his thinking. It's like...traumatic over-analysis, he supposed. Granted, he'd miss everybody terribly if they failed to write, but....the thought of regularly corresponding with people was just....more trouble than it was worth. Besides, he would probably depress them with whatever he wrote anyway. No sense in worrying anybody.

All the Dursleys glared at him as he climbed in the car. He would have set the cage on the seat between him and Dudley, but as his cousin resembled the offspring of Mack lorry meets vintage Rolls, there just wasn't enough room. How is it possible that somebody

who's lost weight can still take up over half a bench seat? Harry thought incredulously. Instead, he balanced the owl cage on his lap, careful to keep concealed the wand under his shirt.

Noticing nobody else had bothered with it (Harry supposed Uncle Vernon and Dudley were too fat and he knew Aunt Petunia despised wrinkled clothing), he buckled his safety belt. Maybe I'll get lucky and we'll have an accident, Harry thought vindictively.

When he shut the door, something very strange happened. A charge of green energy briefly flared around the outside of the vehicle, immediately followed by an ice-water trickle down his back.

Uncle Vernon whipped around, his face turning a nasty shade of puce.

"What do you mean by doing magic, boy!" he roared.

"I didn't do anything!" Harry protested loudly. "How could I, when I've got Hedwig's cage on my lap?"

His uncle flung himself forward, as it was obviously quite difficult for a man of his size to face Harry from a contorted position. Instead, he glowered at Harry from the rearview mirror.

Not really wanting to look at Uncle Vernon's plum-shaded face anymore, Harry glanced away, and it happened to be in Dudley's direction.

His cousin was cowering and jiggling like a gigantic flesh-coloured gelatin mold. This has to be a record, Harry noticed with morbid amusement, watching Dudley shake as a bowl full of jelly. Only sixteen years old, and already elephantine Dudders could give St. Nicholas a run for his money.

"No more monkey business," Uncle Vernon seethed through clenched teeth, "or so help me, I'll make your life so miserable, you'll wish you'd never heard of Privet Drive."

Harry's head snapped to the front of the car with a near-audible crack.

“Believe me, you’re already much too late for that,” he snarled in retaliation. “Just bugger off, I have more important things to deal with than the likes of you,” he lashed out.

Uncle Vernon narrowed his eyes warningly.

“You watch your language, you insolent, ungrateful, little leech, or I swear I’ll—“

“You’ll what?” Harry cut in dangerously. “Spare me your tiresome threats. You’re already aware of what’ll happen if my wizard friends find out about you.” His eyes flashed menacingly. “I might have something to lose by hexing you into oblivion, but they don’t,” he finished savagely; knowing not a word of it was true.

Aunt Petunia gave a shocked gasp as Dudley started trembling even more, whilst attempting to cram his titanic self further against the doorframe away from Harry.

Uncle Vernon made a feral growl in the back of his throat and jammed the vehicle into drive.

Folding his arms tightly against his chest, Harry stared resolutely out the window.

Fifteen minutes ago he had said goodbye to his wizard friends, and fifteen minutes later his loathsome relatives were already starting in on him. One thing was clear, however. Harry would not take their rubbish this summer. He’d had more than enough. NO MORE!

Though truth be told, the most pressing concerns on his mind weren’t the Dursleys or even Sirius, for that matter.

It was the green flash they’d all seen. Also the trickling sensation down his back. Nearly the only times he had seen green flashes of light was when someone was playing around with Dark magic. Definitely not a good sign.

The ice-water-down-the-spine trick he’d felt only once before when Mad-Eye Moody had used the Disillusionment Charm on him during

his escape from Little Whinging nearly a year ago. Most peculiar, and again—not a good sign.

He supposed he should say something to the Dursleys about this, but knew it wouldn't do any good. They'd just start shouting at him again.

Uncle Vernon angrily jerked the car about with his huge ham-fists.

Coming out of the car park, they had been nearly struck by no less than four drivers.

Harry's uncle roared and shook with anger at each near-hit, whilst making rude gestures toward the offending cars.

"Bloody idiots must be going blind!" he bellowed, as each driver ignored him and his road rage.

The near-accidents were happening to them on the roads, too.

Harry struggled to keep Hedwig's cage from sliding around off his lap as Uncle Vernon jerked the steering wheel hither and thither.

And then it happened.

During a particularly nasty curve on a road, the car lifted violently high into the air. Everyone but Harry was yelling in fright.

Uncle Vernon yanked the wheel too far and overcorrected. They had absolutely no time to brace themselves; the car appeared to put on an extra burst of speed as it careened almost straight downward.

What transpired next appeared to take no time and an eternity all in one.

Simultaneously, Uncle Vernon screamed, Petunia shrieked, Dudley squealed, Harry gasped. Their cries seemed to go on and on, but they logically were airborne for only seconds.

As Harry's hands closed convulsively around the bars of Hedwig's cage, he could've sworn he saw hooded figures out the front windscreen.

Death Eaters! he noticed, horrified, here in the heart of London!

Then the car rotated on its axis and smashed at an odd angle straight into the ground.

Upon impact, Harry felt the seatbelt pull taught across his body and bite into him. Something inside cracked and tore near his shoulder where the seatbelt restrained him, but he had no time to think about it as the car had failed to stop rolling.

Hedwig's cage wrenched out of his grasp as his arms flew outward.

Then the window nearest Harry exploded; the car turned and his errant limbs caught the shards.

Something huge rammed up against him, knocking the wind out of his already-abused body. That must be Dudley, Harry assumed dully.

Suddenly, the car gave a particularly savage jolt as it rolled and balanced precariously up on Harry's side of the vehicle.

His neck whipped back and the side of his head slammed into the car interior, causing him to cry out and tear up.

There came a great heaving groan as the car shuddered, crunched down on all four wheels, and was still. Painfully fighting all the way, Harry gave himself up to the encroaching darkness.

A steady drip-drip-dripping sound brought Harry back to consciousness. It seemed to be originating just below his head.

He moaned and went to raise a hand to his forehead automatically; it was aching fiercely.

Yelping a raspy Gah! at the stabbing pain in his neck and shoulder that started at this simple movement, he opened his eyes. Why couldn't he move his arm, and why did it hurt so badly?

Harry could now tell that he was bent almost double, with only a shoulder strap of a seatbelt to hold him up. I'm in a car? he realised wildly. Everything was blurred, as his glasses had mysteriously disappeared. It was also quite dark.

Then he caught site of the red rivulet streaming down his left arm and onto his lap. Harry nearly retched in revulsion after catching a glimpse of the mince the window glass had made of his forearm.

It all started coming back to him...the green flash....the swerving car....the flight....the crash...

"HEDWIG!" he shouted and began rising. Harry yelled "Ouch!" as the back of his head struck something immediately behind it. Sinking back downward, he used his good hand to hold the new lump forming on the back of his head.

Apparently, the passenger bubble of the vehicle had been almost totally compressed where he was sitting. He tried looking around him, but the ache near his shoulder severely limited the movement. Lovely. Trapped. He was trapped.

He had to get out of here. NOW. Find out what happened to Hedwig and the Dursleys. And why in the four Houses of Hogwarts hadn't anybody shown up yet to help them? Sun was barely starting to set when they left the train station, and now the street torches were lit, casting an eerie light about the scene. This place should be swarming with emergency response personnel. Or at the very least, curious passerby should've noticed a smashed car in their midst. Where were all the people?

If ever a time came to flout the Decree for the Restriction of Underage Wizardry, this was it. Ministry of Magic be damned.

Praying he would still find his trusty wand, he reached under his t-shirt. Good—still there! But as he pulled it out, it came apart in his hands.

“Oh no!” he croaked in lament, as the phoenix feather fluttered out onto his bloodied trouser leg. Apparently, his seatbelt had slapped against it too hard, causing it to snap in half lengthwise with the grain.

What now? Harry had been half-sure he could pull off some sort of rescue with his wand. What was he supposed to do? If he could just get in contact with a wizard, any wizard...any good wizard...think, think, THINK!

Harry blinked involuntarily as something trickled into his eye. Reaching up a hand to clear it away, his fingers came away slicked with matted hair and coagulated blood. Was there anyplace left on him that wasn't oozing? A deep gouge ran from temple up to hairline. Evidently his glasses had left a nasty impression where his head had struck the door. And the source of the dripping that woke him had been his own open head wound. An ominous sign yet ironically reassuring. Dead men don't bleed.

Eurgh, Harry slapped himself mentally, snap out of it. Don't think grotesquely, just—get it over with, cover it up, and above all don't think about it...or you'll go mad. Besides, calming down should be a piece of cake. You've dealt with Voldemort four times successfully; you can certainly deal with a Muggle-world car crash.

He felt a tingling sensation on his leg and looked down. The phoenix feather was sparkling feebly; it had already soaked up some of the liquid underneath it. To avoid it more damage, he slipped it in his pocket. Gaining solace in the limited effects, Harry was inspired to take assessment of the situation...stock injuries along with what he did and didn't have available to him.

Pushing his aching brain into clinical mode, he checked himself over. Cut on the head, cuts on the arms, legs seemed okay—he flexed them experimentally. His ribs where Dudley ran into him were starting to throb and it was becoming gradually harder to breathe as well. But his shoulder....he raised his good hand and gingerly probed the

painful area. Wincing, Harry concluded the seatbelt had snapped his collarbone as well as his wand. This could get to be problematic. In order to move, he was going to have to secure his useless arm somehow.

It was a good thing he made it a regular practise wearing an over shirt.

At least the hand on his bad arm still worked; he'd need it to undo the sleeve buttons on the opposite arm. Catching the cuff of the sleeve in his teeth, he carefully shrugged his right arm out of the shirt. Next, he tried to just tie the empty sleeve to the tail; it wouldn't work—to unsupported.

Setting his jaw, he carefully peeled back the other shredded sleeve from his left arm. Then he closed his eyes and brought it free after unbuttoning the cuff.

Again using his teeth and tongue with the good hand, he knotted the ends of the shirt collar together. Could still come undone...double knot it—there.

Despite the coolness of evening, he was beginning to sweat. This was indeed hard work; knotting a shirt in the dark hunched over half-blind with a shoulder injury.

Harry slid the knotted shirt collar up behind the elbow of his hurt arm, laying the remainder of the shirt across his lap. He picked up the sleeve nearest his torso, carefully sliding it up over the back of his neck and holding the end in his mouth.

Next Harry reached for the opposite sleeve and began the somewhat tedious process of double-tying the sleeve ends together; he had to get them to hold without cinching his arm too high. When the fit seemed right, he then folded the remainder of the fabric across his lap width-wise in on itself; knotting the length was a bit more of an issue.

Since he was unable to raise the shirttail close enough to tie the end in his teeth, he instead twisted up the excess material as a bread baggie, and simply held onto it in the hand of his injured arm.

Panting with his exertions, Harry allowed himself a break to rest. He could still not hear any telltale noise, save for the street sounds and crickets outside.

Time to vacate this deathtrap, he resolved.

Harry reached across his chest with his good arm and attempted to pull the door lever out...but it was already jammed in the open position. He then pushed on the door a bit, but it wouldn't budge.

Just as well, he told himself. Hadn't really believed it would be that easy besides. Since he obviously couldn't begin boisterously ramming the door open due to his arm injury, he'd just have to reposition himself to kick it open. Somehow.

Harry grabbed the two halves of his wand he'd set on the seat and prised the seatbelt buckle open with them. He then tucked them into his sling. Feeling behind him, he tried to gauge how much room he would have to manoeuver with on the seat. The answer? Not much.

His hand ran into Dudley almost straightaway.

It seemed the only way he was going to get even a little more room was by wedging himself in the dark floor space at their feet. Great. Never in his life had Harry wished he was still a runty child more than now.

Steeling himself, he swung up his legs, rolled right and pushed himself diagonally downward in one smooth motion. One way or another, he thought in mild surprise, that could've gone worse. Now he was just about flush with the back of the driver's seat, with enough room to kick out toward the door.

Which was undoubtedly going to hurt more than a little. Just do it.

Shutting his eyes, he summoned all the strength and rage he possessed on that stubborn door; the door between him and freedom.

“You stupid thing—” he flung out feet together in punctuated rhythm—

WHAM! Wince.

“I will not—”

WHAM! Flinch.

“Let you stay—”

WHAM! Gulp.

“Between me—”

CRUNCH! Whimper.

“And my rescue!”

CREEEAAK! Elation.

At last, the hateful door gave way; before Harry could move any more, he had to catch his breath.

Cradling his arm and sucking in sharp shallow breaths through his teeth, he felt an undeniable sense of victory surge through him despite the pain. Even though it was far from over, this was a major step he’d just accomplished.

Someone else in the car was stirring now and Harry could tell it was Dudley by the tone. The shouting had probably roused him.

“Dudley?” Harry called hoarsely.

“Dudley!” he shouted louder. Still, no cognitive response.

Hooking a foot outside the car, he half-scooted half-pushed himself slowly and painfully out the opening. As difficult as it had been to kick

the door open, this was undeniably worse. He felt something jabbing him in his already achy side.

Jamming his free arm beneath himself, he retrieved the offending item. His glasses. Or rather, what was left of them. The lenses were completely missing; a gnarled black wire was all that remained. He doubted even Hermione knew a spell powerful enough to repair this mishmash. Knowing it was hopeless, Harry stashed the wire into his sling with the pieces of his wand. Just keep moving...

He twisted his body and spilled out of the car unceremoniously onto his knees. Ow, ow, ow, he chanted to himself with every painful breath. At least it was grass he'd landed on. They appeared to have crashed in some sort of park. And he was free. Free!

Quickly pushing himself up off the ground, Harry felt a ripple of nausea pass through him and vomited on the lawn. Shaking now, he lowered himself carefully back down. Just what I need, he thought disgustedly, to get sick all over everybody and everything. Things just can't go worse!

But in an instant they did. Infinitely worse.

Despite the already-present throb in his head, Harry felt an unmistakable staggering flame sear through his curse scar. It had been a good thing he was so close to ground; had he been standing, he would be sprawled out by now. As it was, he tried to make heads or tails of what he just sensed.

Voldemort...was...angry. Very angry about something—furious in fact. Something involving him—Harry. Probably angry his Death Eaters haven't found me yet, he supplied mentally. This put a brand new sense of urgency on the situation. If Voldemort were looking for him, he'd have to get somewhere safe...quickly. He'd be an easy target, with no glasses, no wand, and a broken arm.

Harry stood up—more deliberately this time—and began squinting around in the darkness for his owl's cage. Turning in the direction of the car, he noticed something very odd indeed. Save for his door being open, he couldn't see a car at all. So the green flash had been

an Invisibility Charm. That explains why nobody came for rescue. Nobody could see them while they were in the car.

Opposite from the side of the car he was on, he could make out a little hillock. Evidently the one they had rolled down and come to rest at the bottom of. Trying to focus his eyes on a glint he spotted, he skirted carefully around the area of car where he estimated the rear was occupying.

Looking down, he lowered himself next to the glint. This was indeed Hedwig's cage. It was resting on the mangled wires, tipped over on one side. His pet was slumped over in the bottom, still and breathing very shallowly.

"Oh, Hedwig," Harry said roughly, "I'm so sorry...my faithful friend..."

Crouching down slowly, he opened and gingerly reached inside the cage. He lifted her gently and righted the cage with the toe of his shoe, and reverently set her in the bottom and shut the door.

"I promise, I'll get you help soon," he swore to her while slowly easing himself back up. Catching hold of the cage in his hand, he carried it over to the open car door and placed it inside.

Peering inside at the Dursleys, he couldn't see anything outwardly wrong with them, but that didn't mean anything. Even barring the fact he had no glasses. Dudley was still making odd noises and mumbling.

Regardless of the need to leave, Harry still found himself requiring a rest again. Each walk around was becoming more and more exhaustive as the stitch in his side grew and it became increasingly harder to breathe.

Obviously that ache was where the cursed seatbelt had restrained him. Oh well, as long as I'm still moving, he resigned to himself.

Now to set about summoning immediate wizard assistance.

Even if Harry could open the boot, he knew he was in absolutely no shape to ride his Firebolt. It would be suicide. After all, he'd tried riding a broom with a broken arm once before with calamitous results.

More to the point, he needed think of something that required minimum effort to accomplish due to his waning strength. This weakness was very disconcerting; he'd always been able to handle things before. Save for the dementors. However, he could now accomplish that with relative ease as well. What was wrong with him?

Harry leaned heavily against the invisible car. Never mind. What we need is transportation...for several people...fast...something glimmered across Harry's mind...

The Knight Bus? He nearly rejected the idea out of hand, it was so crazy. The Knight bus-turned ambulance? Absurd! Maniacal blind-as-a-bat Ernie behind the wheel...if the car crash hadn't killed the Dursleys, a ride in the Knight Bus was sure to. With a broken wand, he very likely couldn't summon the bus regardless. Unless...

Harry slid back down near ground and removed his mangled glasses and wand from the sling. Retrieving the phoenix feather buried in his pocket, he then placed it in the centre of one of the red-tinged halves of wand and lined it up with the other half. Good thing they still matched. Now for something to hold this mélange all together...

Gripping the wand handle in his left hand despite the sling's fabric bunch, he held it fast between his index and middle fingers. Carefully, he secured one end of his glasses wire against the base of the wand with his thumb; with the other hand he spiralled the rest of the wire around up the tip as high as it would reach.

Harry looked dubiously at his woefully inadequate repair job. What a mess, he thought with distaste. After that, he pushed himself up the car fender again with great effort and positioned his feet. Here goes nothing, he thought. Closing his eyes, he buried his head against his shoulder and jutted out his wand hand.

Not a thing happened.

In a fit of frustration, he growled and hawked several large spit wads all over the dead wand. This WILL work, I HAVE to leave, Voldemort's on his way, he thought furiously whilst frantically smearing the saliva into the crack in his wand as best he could. And all of this hard effort is going to pay off right—

“NOW!” Harry shouted as he thrust his wand arm back into the air as high as it would go. A bolt of energy shot through him from toe to wand tip.

Suddenly, a large popping sound rent the air as the lurid purple Knight Bus appeared and slowed to a stop not far from him.

Bringing down his arm, he gazed at his substandard wand in sheer amazement. Three cheers for magical loogies, Harry thought in a daze.

“Huzzah,” he whispered in salute to his damaged wooden tangle.

A thankfully familiar figure emerged from the bus as it opened, and stood silhouetted in the doorway. The man was recognisable, even though Harry was without his specs and in the dark.

“‘Oo ‘sair?” questioned Stan Shunpike, narrowing his eyes in Harry's general direction.

“Stan!” Harry shouted in blessed relief, “Stan, it's me—Harry Potter!”

“Arry Potter, ‘ay?” Stan repeated skeptically. “Ow come I can't see you?” Shunpike's eyes were still not focussing on him.

“What do you mean you ‘can't see me’?” he said to Stan frantically.

“Well, we can see you,” replied Ernie who had come down the steps behind Stan, “but we can't see you,” he finished most unhelpfully, squinting into the darkness as Stan was.

They can't see me? Harry's mind reeled as more panic rose within him by the minute. Curious passengers were beginning to gawk out the windows of the bus. Why didn't—of course! he remembered. The

trickle down his back outside King's Cross Station! The Disillusionment Charm he'd suspected all along.... Just explain a bit to Stan and Ernie...I'll be fine.

"Someone used a Disillusionment Charm on me, and I can't reverse it! Plus my wand is broken!" Harry shouted, feeling a bit dizzy now. "It happened to four of us, we're hurt, we need—"

"An' 'ow d'we know this isn't a prank?" Stan said suspiciously, cutting him off.

"Good finkin'," tossed Ernie to Stan over his shoulder. Then to Harry, "'Ow d'we know you're not pranking' us?"

"It's not a prank!" Harry yelled as hard as he could, head pounding in protest, "this is serious, we all need a ride on your blasted bus—"

"'Cause we've been pranked before," Stan began again as if Harry hadn't even spoken, "by 'nvis'ble drunk wizards, we're not 'bout to let it 'appen again, y'know," he finished firmly, nodding his head and turning with Ernie to leave.

Harry screamed in aggravation. Why would these idiots not listen! The Knight Bus was his last hope. If it left without he and the Dursleys....

As his thoughts and feelings worked into a lather, he began breathing more shallowly and painfully than ever. What would happen to him, what would happen to Hedwig...a random errant image of Sirius flashed over his mental circuit. Sirius wouldn't give up, Harry seized on the thought, he would fight to the last...he would make these fools see! I'll fight like Sirius! If he could only make himself stop hyperventilating.

"What is happening here?" called out a clear female voice in utmost authority. Harry hadn't even seen the woman enter the bus doorway, blocking Stan's and Ernie's retreat back inside. He couldn't have answered even if he had noticed her.

“Oi, nuffink, ma’am,” Stan immediately replied, he and Ernie snapping to almost-attention. “Jes’ some joker.”

“Yeah,” joined in Ernie, “someone ‘oo ‘sinvis’ble, telling us ‘ees got ‘urt wif ‘urt people an’ fings—“

“What did you say?” she questioned them both sharply, alighting off the steps in a rush.

Harry tried in a vain attempt to attract her attention as even more anger coursed through him at his inability. Think about Sirius, he reminded himself, deal with by fighting it. His vision was getting fuzzier, and he was beginning to pass out.

The witch strode purposefully in toward him, as if listening for Harry’s strangled breathing.

“Some bloke,” started Stan again, “sayin ‘is wan’ is broke an’ if that’s so, ‘ow could ‘ee call us ‘ere? Says someone ‘it ‘im wif a Disillu—fingy. It ‘as to be a joke, ‘sappened before,” he defended. “Gits.”

Suddenly Harry felt a very odd sensation, which seemed to originate with his frustration; it felt as if something heavy and stringy was issuing forth from his scalp. It itched relentlessly too. He watched, astonished, as his hair magically grew down passed the front of his face to his waist. What the bloody hell? He commenced choking as his hair flowed in a black curtain about him. Going from too much air to not enough...

“‘Ee also says ‘is name is “Arry Potter,” Ernie added helpfully as an afterthought.

“Moronic simpletons!” shouted the tall woman after this revelation. She pushed passed them in Harry’s direction, pulling out her wand in a flash. Then she pointed it at Harry as if she had known where he was all along.

“Finite Disillusio!” her voice rang out.

Three gasps punctuated the darkness as a hot water-like blast washed over Harry and he was finally revealed for all to see.

Evidently, his weakened body had had enough. Just as the witch rushed for him, he felt his knees finally buckle under stress. Strong arms caught and held him upright.

“See!” yelled Stan and Ernie together, and pointed accusingly in Harry’s direction. “That’s no’ ‘Arry Potter! “Ee ‘as much shorter ‘air an’ glasses—“

“I don’t care if he’s the Great Nicodemus Incarnate!” Her eyes sparked an inferno of warning. “This young man needs help!” shouted the witch lividly.

She peered down critically at him in her arms. Drawing her wand out again, she rested it straight on his constricted airway and incanted soothingly, “Evictiphobius Accioncordia.”

Immediately, Harry was able to breathe more easily, save the ever-present stitch in his right side. As he sucked in great gulps of air, the witch swept the hair back from his face with one arm while still holding him in the other. As she surveyed his forehead, her brows knitted together and smoothed again. For once, it wasn’t his scar someone was worried about.

“Don’t fight this fear with rage,” she told him in the same comforting tone as her last spell, “assuage it with an inner calm. Listen to your heartbeat, breathe with it.”

Just as he started to feel a bit more relaxed, Harry felt another wave of sickness crash over him and began retching at their feet. The witch held his newly long hair back from his mouth and addressed Ernie and Stan again. They flinched at her words.

“You two should be ashamed of yourselves. If you had better powers of observation, you would’ve known that the entire Wizard World is out looking for a young dark-haired teenage wizard and his three Muggle companions, with special attention to be paid in the London area. It was said they were possibly injured or disoriented, and to be

offered assistance. The Alert—sent out by the Minister of Magic himself—went out over the Wireless more than four hours ago.”

She helped Harry straighten up as he finished with his sickness, still acting the epitome of righteous indignation.

“Now I’m not sure if the Alert meant Harry Potter, and I haven’t seen any wizards yet with this boy right here—” her eyes flicked to Harry, “but he emerged under your noses by means of some very suspicious circumstances—with injuries whilst in the London area,” she emphasized crossly.

Harry looked up at her and spoke up again finally. “Thank you,” he said gratefully, in a winded tone.

“It’s all part of the job,” she replied rather curtly. Then abruptly, “Are you Harry Potter?” She glared daggers at Stan and Ernie after asking, as if daring them to challenge Harry’s answer.

“Yes, I am,” he replied guardedly, inching away from her and wilting against the car.

Now he could see that magic folk started to stream out of the bus and onto the grass around him and the vehicle. He severely doubted any Death Eaters would be foolish enough to show up here in their midst.

Apparently, his reappearance had caused quite an uproar. When he looked behind him, he saw precisely why. The Dursleys were all as visible as he was; they sat sprawled as if floating in midair since the car surrounding them was still not visible.

“And who are these people?” she questioned and gestured, her voice all business.

“My aunt, uncle, and cousin—Muggles,” he concluded quietly as his head, arm, and side started aching more again. Little lightheadedness spots twinkled at the edge of his vision.

“And how much of this is yours?” she said, pointing to the various red blotches on his body and clothing under his mane of thick hair.

“Wuh, the blood?” he looked at her weirdly. What an odd question. “All of it, I suspect.” Her eyes grew huge.

“You, you, and you—” she spun about and shouted unexpectedly, pointing to three wizards, “I want you to each open one of those doors—” she pointed to the Dursleys—“when you turn the car visible, and DON’T move anybody until I come back!”

Not bothering waiting for replies, the witch turned back to Harry and got him to lean off the car once more.

She then slid a protective arm under his hair around his waist. He sagged against her as she helped him navigate and walk slowly up the steps of the Knight Bus. It was getting harder for him to remember how to put one foot in front of the other. He should tell her about the Death Eaters...

“I trust you won’t bungle up the task of helping young Mr. Potter find a seat,” she said coldly to Stan, who slunk back inside the bus. Now he looked properly abashed.

“No, ma’am.” Stan turned around, head hanging, and gestured Harry to an empty bed.

“You will also see to it that he remains seated indefinitely,” she clipped off in a voice which left no room for argument.

“Yes, ma’am.” Stan blinked.

“That means “at all costs”, she amended after recalculating her words.

“Yes, ma’am. ‘Ndef’nately, ma’am.”

“Make sure that he does not fall asleep either. Do you understand?”

“Arry Potter’s not to fall asleep, yes ma’am.”

Wrinkling her brow imperiously at Shunpike a last time, she turned to Harry and snapped, “I’ll be right back, don’t go anywhere.”

After turning around and walking up the aisle a bit, she vanished three of the beds with a rather complex-sounding spell on her way out.

Stan seemed to have read the unspoken question on Harry's lips.

"Tha' tair's Madam Adonna. Polite an' friendly to a fault—in a non-'mergency situation—but if sick or 'urt folks're about, she turns into a right hippogriff on a rampage until the danger's o'er." He nodded knowingly at Harry. "An' she's also an 'ealer at St. Mungo's," added Stan in an almost reverent voice.

Interesting. Harry had never seen a fully-trained wizard healer at her element before. Wondering through his thickening mental fog he said, "Are all healers snippy like that? She certainly seems to know her stuff, though," added Harry hastily, just in case.

"Dunno," answered Stan. "She 's th' only one I know of 'oo reg'larly chooses t' ride th' Knight Bus. Says Disapparatin' all th' time makes wizards lazy," he finished, shrugging.

Harry lapsed into silence about then. As he sat there, oddly disjointed thoughts strayed cross his mind. What would he do if his aunt and uncle died? What was up with this hair thing? People were searching for him, he now knew. For hours. So far, his scar had only hurt that once. Where would he be taken now? The Order would be near spare with worry, he was certain. I should tell someone about the Death Eaters, he reminded himself again. Why did that critical piece of information keep slipping his mind?

Not knowing how long he'd sat there, Harry vaguely noticed he was getting colder. Much colder. But his face felt flushed at the same time. Weird. Before long he started feeling jittery and shivery and closed his eyes to try and ward it all off. Harry was so very exhausted... If I close my eyes, I can make it stop...

"Don' you be driftin' off on me," Stan said irritably, slapping Harry roughly about the face and bringing him rudely back to full consciousness. Madam 'ould 'ave my 'ead iffen she came back an' you were passed out."

Throwing a warm blanket about Harry's shoulders he continued, "You can 'ave one o' these," and bringing up a steaming mug from nowhere, "an' 'ere's an 'ot choc'late, compliments of th' establishment," he finished with a quirky sideways smile.

Harry gratefully took the warm mug from Stan and practically curled himself around it. Apparently I was colder than I thought, he mused, taking steady sips of the liquid. What is it with wizard chocolate that helps one feel calmer? he wondered, as its influence spread through him the more he drank. The fuzzy blanket was working like a charm, too. He began feeling nominally better though his injuries pulsed with every heartbeat.

Harry contemplated Stan for a moment; apparently the young conductor was trying to atone for his earlier serious error in judgment.

"Why Stan, I never knew you cared," he said looking up at Shunpike, reflecting the same bemused expression.

The young man brightened instantly. "S'all part of the job, Mr. Potter," he swaggered with supercilious dignity, a twinkle in his eye.

"Hey," Harry began, remembering something important, "I was wondering if you could tell Madam Adonna about my owl, Hedwig—"

He stopped in midsentence. What they saw next made all thought fly from his mind.

Stan and Harry froze as the bus door squeaked open and a piercing wail filled the air. Harry knew that sound well. It came from the sirens of the Muggle law enforcement—Scotland Yard! He must've been very knackered indeed not to have noticed the flashing lights and ruckus that were just outside. Please don't let them have started an investigation, he thought, horrified.

Foreboding filled his chest as he watched the wizard folk quickly climb aboard in mostly-silence and take their seats. Had the Muggles seen them? Harry knew that the Knight Bus was invisible to non-

magic people when it was moving, but he doubted it had ever stayed in one exposed place for so long before.

His fellow passengers spoke in hushed voices, hardly saying a word except out of necessity. The Dursleys were brought in with them—on what were obviously conjured stretchers, wheeled but not floating—and secured in place. Dudley was still muttering oaths in his semiconscious state; Harry's aunt and uncle were still out cold. They all looked ghastly pale.

Harry looked back up as Madam Adonna stiffly walked inside, bringing up the rear. Her jaw was set and her eyes were luminous—she looked positively grim.

As Harry squinted, he realised why. Two officers of the Metropolitan Police had tromped onto the bus behind her! He drew a sharp breath, which stabbed his aching ribcage and collarbone. So they had been seen! They all stopped here because of meHarry thought with pangs of guilt. The wizards severely outnumbered the officers though. Surely they could be overcome if necessary.

After Madam Adonna had checked to make sure the Dursleys cots were secure, she practically shoved the Met officers gracelessly down on a bed together as far to the back of the bus as possible. Their hip radios crackled with the goings on between the Metropolitan Police Station and its mobile units. So that's why we're not overcoming them, Harry noticed, they're probably keeping in contact with their patrol cars outside.

"I suggest you stay seated, sirs, we don't need any more injuries tonight," Madam Adonna practically growled, still remaining dangerously polite.

At first, the two officers looked as if they were going to fly up at her in retaliation, but came to the dawning realisation they were out of their element here. Plus the look on Madam Adonna's face could melt cauldrons.

Then she turned to everyone at large and said tightly, “I’m sure these men won’t bite, and won’t mind if we continue interacting with one another.”

Harry noticed as she quickly tried to catch every solemn magic eye and continued hurriedly onward.

“After all, it was our...’Anachronistic Convention,’ ” Madam Adonna wrapped her mouth around the words with a distasteful sneer, “which we of course abandoned to help these poor car crash victims in their hour of need. Right, gentlemen?” She stared mightily toward the two officers in the back.

“Er, quite right, Doctor,” one began, loudly clearing his throat. “Yes well, carry on then,” said the other one, gesturing languidly with one arm.

Madam Adonna smiled, which was more like a grimace.

“And as much as we all appreciate your selfless escort to hospital, I have a patient to attend to straightaway,” she gestured behind herself to Harry, “so if you will excuse me.”

She briskly strode up the aisle to where Stan and Harry were. As she did, Harry saw the Muggle officers staring at him, forgetting themselves. When Harry returned their looks, they quickly glanced away after having realised what they were doing—not allowing privacy aboard public transport. An offence near punishable by death in some counties.

Madam Adonna gave Harry the once-over again. Her eyes flickered briefly and she looked to Stan.

“Mr. Shunpike.”

“Yes, ma’am.” The conductor was looking anywhere but at her.

She went on in a slightly repentant tone, “You gave a peaky shocked car crash victim a blanket and hot chocolate.”

Stan gulped and looked as if he wanted to sink into the floor.

“Aye, ma’am.”

“Well done. You made adequate use of the resources available. Considering your earlier “nincomperformance”, I never would have believed it possible.”

Shunpike was positively nonplussed and simply said, “Fank you, Madam Adonna.”

Then she leaned over to him and hissed quietly, “Stan, tell Ernie book it to the nearest Muggle hospital. This is something I was going to have us do anyway, just not in so “enthusiastic” a method.” She glanced to the back of the bus. “No magic in front of the Muggles—as we all know—and best speed! Muggle speed Stan—we don’t want any of our non-magical or injured passengers to suffer any permanent ill effects from their ride.”

Shunpike clicked his heels together and gave her a small salute by way of understanding, and about faced to his seat at the front of the bus.

Before Harry could ask her anything, Madam faced him again and said in the same hushed tones, “We found your owl in the backseat and the wizard’s paraphernalia in the boot. Luckily someone had already Disapparated with the owl to a place where she can be looked after and they will of course, stay in touch via the Floo Powder Network. The other belongings were left with another young wizard who will be meeting us later at hospital. We believed the things should be kept from prying Muggle eyes; he brought them to the Ministry for safe keeping where he’s also giving a report on your whereabouts.”

She was speaking so swiftly and softly; Harry could hardly keep up with what she was saying.

“And my relatives?” he spoke up quietly, glancing back at the Dursleys on their beds.

Madam Adonna pursed her lips and her eyes clouded over. "I've done all I can for them right now. The young one looks the most promising for recovery, however. There just wasn't enough time before the bobbies showed up; evidently several people called in after seeing us and told the Yard that a bunch of freaks were participating in a car-burning riot. By then, the kneazle was out of the bag—we couldn't jump them, and now we have Met patrol clearing us a path to hospital."

The bus lurched violently to life and had it not been for the Madam standing right by, Harry would've tumbled off the side of the bed.

He gasped in shock and pain as she caught him; the hot chocolate dropped out of his hand to crash on the floor. Madam Adonna's catch had jolted all of his injuries but he supposed it would've been worse had he been left to fall. Everyone in the bus, including the Met men, studiously ignored the interaction between he and the healer. They chose instead to murmur amongst themselves in hushed tones. Thank Godric for British politeness.

"I've only got a few minutes to attend your injuries, it's your turn with the "doctor" now," she redirected, trying hard not to jostle too much whilst pushing him back upright. "That's what I told them I am, so they wouldn't force us to wait for their ambulances."

Harry found he could not sit up however; the bumps and bangs of the bus were too much for him to handle. He started feeling sick again due to Ernie's annoying overcorrections and began breathing gingerly once more. And his ribcage...it was starting to hurt even more than his broken collarbone, and that was saying something.

Immediately noticing his distress, Madam Adonna gently lowered him to lie flat on the bed. It really didn't help much.

"We convinced the Patrol it would be better for us to take you in, since we could carry the four of you in one. Logic won out."

"Now we'll get your shoulder," she said, mostly to herself.

Leaning over him, she examined his crude sling.

“You did this.” She was near amazed.

“Yes.” He clenched his teeth as the bus moved.

“Clever, Potter. Near genius,” she appraised.

Harry tried responding, but the bus chose that moment to brake and Madam Adonna had to catch him again. This ride is going to kill me, he thought through a haze of pain.

“Normally I would want to remove this straight away with a Vanishing Spell, but you’re bleeding somewhere.”

Making sure the Muggle officers still weren’t watching, she carefully brought her wand out from underneath her cloak and discreetly pointed it at him. She closed her eyes and waved it above and around his left arm as if divining something from the action. Which, Harry mused, she probably was.

Her eyes opened, and she said, “Nasty business. It’s just as I thought; not only did your collarbone snap, but the shoulder has become separated from its socket. If I tell the bones to mend, your arm will be in the wrong place—it needs to be set. It requires a very powerful spell—loudly incanted—to repair it and not even those two,” she vaguely gestured to the Met—“will miss the significance without a distraction.”

The wizard’s low-key conversation was punctuated with crackling messages sent via the Met’s hip radios. They appeared to be communicating at regular intervals with their escort backup.

Reaching up, Madam Adonna carefully untied the knotted shirt-sling and unwrapped it from his forearm. It stabbed, burned and itched as a fire; the shirt fabric was clinging to the wound.

Harry clamped down his teeth even harder.

“This would be broken glass—“ Madam began.

"Broken glass," he said with her through gritted teeth.

"My kingdom for a potions dresser," she went on, nearly shaking her head. "Usually, I'd just apply something to dissolve the foreign object, give you some Derma-Gro to heal the slashes in your arm and be done with it." She paused as if resigning herself. "As it is, we'll have to settle for quick and dirty. Brace yourself, Potter. Accio Vitro Deruptus!"

Harry barely had time to think as he felt the glass pieces rip out of his skin at Madam Adonna's vociferously whispered command. The action brought an involuntary yelp from his throat. Through his fog, he saw her wand, which was now glistening with the red-stained glass shards once imbedded in his arm. They stuck tight to the tip as if glued to it.

"Mr. Shunpike," she direct crisply to the front of the bus, "fresh bedsheets, if you please."

Stan reached up and pulled some bedding off a shelf somewhere above him and walked quickly through the swaying bus. He alone appeared to be totally unaffected by the vomit-inducing motion.

Taking a sheet from him, Madam Adonna applied it to Harry's forearm, which had started to bleed afresh now the glass had been so forcibly torn out of it. She mopped up the wound and pointed her wand toward it, whispering, "Cauterio Dermia!" Harry felt the area grow intensely warm.

"Best I can do is stop the bleeding," she said apologetically. "I'll do the same here." Reaching for Harry's head, she swept his hair out of the way again. She grabbed another sheet from Stan and started cleaning away the blood on his forehead.

Harry's end of the conversation was minimal; he was trying to tolerate the swerving vibrations of the bus combined with all his physical pain. It required loads of effort. But he still had to ask something.

"You said you planned to go to Muggle hospital. Why?"

The healer blazed a look into his face. "Because something dangerous is happening at St. Mungo's; I don't trust it. I don't think you'd be safe there."

She said it with such finality; he knew that would be all she would tell him. It must be something very dangerous, for a healer to trust Muggle medicine above magical arts. So much for that line of questioning.

Then Madam Adonna brought her wand up underneath the sheet and quietly incanted, "Cauterio Dermia!" toward his head wound.

"And now for your collarbone and shoulder," she said in a hushed tone, mostly to herself.

"But I thought you said you couldn't—" he winced painfully.

"Do it without distracting the officers, yes." She smiled grimly. "Trust me, we can distract them. Normally we knock out patients for this procedure, but I don't want to go mucking about with your concussion," said went on, wiping the glass pieces off her wand with another sheet. "Even in bright lighting your pupils are still so dilated, I can hardly tell what colour your grey eyes are."

"But my eyes are green," Harry wheezed automatically.

She gave him a shrewd and calculating look. It was almost...Snape-like in intensity. He didn't like it.

"Very well," she said crisply, shrugging it off, "what we need now is ballast." Turning to Stan, "I require you to stand opposite me on that side of the bed," she fluttered her fingers, "thank you, and grasp Potter's undamaged forearm like this." Stan moved over and reached out his hand.

Madam Adonna leaned over and placed his and Stan's hands and forearms together from fingertip to elbow, interlocking the digits. She appeared oblivious to the complete awkwardness of the situation; however, Harry and Stan studiously avoided looking in one another's direction after exchanging looks.

“No matter what Potter does to you,” said Madam Adonna to Shunpike in dead seriousness, “do not move or let go. I’ll have your head if you do.”

Harry’s eyes widened hugely while Stan swallowed timidly and nodded. The pair steadied themselves as best they could. Neither of them knew what the mad healer would do next. They would find out soon enough though.

Throwing a last glance over her shoulder to make sure the Met men were still not watching, Madam Adonna carefully stretched Harry’s injured arm out to full length.

Then she lifted her eyes up to Harry’s face and steadily said, “I’m not going to lie to you; this will hurt like hell on a hippogriff. Don’t let go of Stan’s arm. We’ll go on the count of three—count with me, Potter.”

“One,” they began together.

“Two.” Harry held his breath and steeled himself.

“Thraaaaaaaaaaaaauuuggghh!” he screamed for all he was worth.

Madam Adonna had yanked outward on his arm a count early; he felt certain the woman was trying to tear it off. As if that weren’t bad enough, she actually twisted it, but something in his shoulder thunked back into place as he bellowed again. Stan’s voice had joined him; apparently Harry had unknowingly grasped Shunpike’s arm in a viselike grip. True to his word, Stan still never moved an inch.

Whilst the entire melee, Madam Adonna sneaked out her wand and pointed it at his collarbone and shouted, “FOKKUS CLAVIKUS REVITIKUS!”

Harry felt a weird tingling hot spot crawling under his skin as his arm was healed at last. But a terrible stabbing sensation now pierced him from inside all along his right ribcage. As Madam and Stan finally let go of his arms, he curled fetally around that terrible ache.

In spite of himself, Harry was really beginning to hate Madam Adonna. He knew logically she was only trying to heal him, but he couldn't help it. Through his pain, it felt as if she was enjoying how many ways she could make him hurt. I'll show her quick and dirty, he fumed with irrational anger, just give me a good wand. He still couldn't catch his breath.

All the shouting had evidently caught the attention of the Muggle officers. They both stood up in a rush and one yelled imperiously, "What is the meaning of this?"

Now in no mood for even feigned niceties, Madam Adonna whirled around in his direction after laying her wand on the bed.

She matched the officer's volume and threw back at him, "You've been witnessing a routine resetting of a compound shoulder separation," she lied expertly, "and if your laddikens can't handle that, I suggest you remove yourselves from this bus!"

The bus was dead silent save for Harry's gasping.

And as neither one of the proud bobbies wanted to be thought of as less than a man, they glanced at each other and reluctantly strutted to their seat. Or attempted to strut, rather. Their heads knocked painfully together as the bus swayed to and fro when they sat. One of them lost his hat.

Turning back around, Madam Adonna gestured Shunpike back to his seat. She thanked him again as he winced and rubbed the bruise marks on his hand where Harry had gripped him.

Peering down at Harry in renewed concern she said, "Are you all right? I know it's a bit of a shock at first, but it should be feeling—" she stopped herself.

"Potter, I need to see that side you're guarding. Please pull back so I may examine it."

Harry tried his very best to comply; however, he could not.

“I--c--can--n’t,” he tried to tell her through choked sobs, as every breath was agony.

The healer gently pushed him on his back and carefully prised his arms away from his middle.

Placing her wand in the centre of his shirt, she muttered, “Dissendium Diffendo.” His t-shirt split wide open down along the focus.

“Mighty Merlin’s Mercy!” she breathed in a shocked tone, taken aback by what she saw. Quickly remembering where she was, she closed her eyes and lifted her wand to the right side of Harry’s abdomen, once again divining his condition. Harry wanted to ask her what she’d seen, but hadn’t strength or breath enough to do so.

Madam Adonna had barely begun muttering some more incantations over his torso when the Knight Bus ominously came to a screeching halt. They had arrived at hospital. Since the Met had already radioed ahead, the emergency Muggles were standing by and poured onto the bus as soon as it stopped. Harry was out of breath. Madam was out of luck. They were out of time.

The more starved of oxygen he became, the more his senses winked out. Though his eyes were open, Harry could see nothing; he was only distantly aware of a rush of voices surrounding him. He thought he heard someone say, “massive internal injuries” and “emergency surgery”, but couldn’t process what it meant. Thoughts floated around in a surreal tangle. Vaguely he remembered something about Death Eaters...hadn’t seen any in a week or so, had he? Something about his Firebolt in the Ministry of Magic...a wreck of a wand...knotting his shirt?...Sirius opening a mangled car door and letting him out...Dudley cursing in his sleep....

His last coherent thoughts were, what if Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia don’t survive and Dudley does? That would leave us both orphans. In a strange way, we’d be even.

Disclaimer Dear Readers,

Originally, I had decided to write about 10-15 pages of Harry and his death sequence. That was it! Unfortunately, my pen had other ideas, as I just found myself writing, and writing, and writing some more...

So many elements of Rowling's work have been barely explored, and I have many theories about which is hers (though probably all are incorrect) and find they required much back story. It was also my intention to give this version of 'book 6' a completely different flavour than any of the others so far, as I believe Jo will have done the same thing. Nobody likes a "predictable" story after all. I have also decided to give you my story in smaller installments to hopefully reduce the boredom factor. And anyway, an average of 10000 words/week for a chapter is just loads too much. Sorry.

Ms. Rowling, I tip my witch hat to you and your brilliant imagination, syntactical genius, and dauntless fortitude... 'cause some days I just get so sick of Harry Potter writing I want to scream! NO MORE HARRY POTTER FROM MY BRAIN! SO MUCH HP INVOLVEMENT IS DRIVING ME SPARE! IS THERE MORE TO LIFE THAN THIS INDENTURED SERVITUDE TO MY MUSE? randomly tearing hair out in patches)

But I digress. going to my HP—"happy place" What in the world? Harry Potter inhabits my happy place too? PLEASE ENJOY MY Fic. Or face the duality of our anger. LOL. Seriously, have fun reading it.

BREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAK

Harry was striding down the main corridor at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The entire place seemed deserted.

While he was walking, he noticed something else quite odd. As his heels struck the floor, they failed to make any sound. Looking down, he saw nothing impeding the soles of his shoes; they simply weren't making any noise as he walked. Not even shuffling issued forth from them.

As Harry looked down, he took careful notice of what he was wearing. Pleated velvet robes of the blackest black flowed about him from neckline to floor. Every so often, a glittering silver jewel had been placed in the fabric. The crystalline gems took turns winking up in his eyes as he walked. The effect was so real; it felt to Harry as if he were wearing a piece of the night sky. He even thought he could recognise constellation patterns along the folds—from upside down, of course.

If he had a mirror, he could see them straight on.... Harry reached into the pocket of his robes as he walked. A small square mirror—which remarkably resembled the one Sirius had given him—came out in his hand.

Inadequate, but it would have to do. Holding the mirror out in front of his robes, Harry paused over a pattern he had particular cause to notice...the constellation Orion. It contained the star named “dog star” or “Sirius”.

Harry contemplated the star for a bit; suddenly, he heard a shuffling sound in front of him and glanced up. He was seeing the back of a large black dog...very familiar...

“Padfoot!” Harry happily called to the animal, “hey, wait up!”

The dog showed no signs of having heard him and continued walking.

“Oi, Sirius!” he tried again, “please wait for me!”

Breaking into a run, the dog turned and dashed around a corner, and Harry accidentally dropped the small mirror which shattered into a million shards...

The chase was on.

Harry picked up his feet and ran after the animal as fast as he could; it was quite easy for him. Despite his heavy robes he wasn’t even breathing hard. His feet made nary a sound as they struck stone beneath them.

Still, he called out intermittently to the black dog; it failed to show any indications of stopping let alone having heard him. Why would Sirius not slow down?

Harry followed Padfoot-Sirius all the way to the Room of Requirement. For some odd reason, the entrance had been left open. The black dog disappeared inside the opening.

Following Padfoot through the doorway, Harry immediately noticed a large framed looking glass in front of him.

It was the Mirror of Erised. All he'd had to do was think about needing a larger mirror, and Sirius had brought him to one. The black dog was whimpering and pawing as if trying to get through the glass somehow. Slowly, Harry stepped up behind him.

To the dog, he said, "I know, boy; I want to get through the other side of the glass and see Lily and James too." Then he leaned in a little closer and bent over to stroke the dog behind the ears.

At this proximity, the animal looked back at him, jauntily danced around, and headed back for the mirror at a full run.

"NO, Sirius, you can't—" Harry called out loudly.

He watched, shocked, as the black dog dashed through the frame and vanished before his very eyes.

Sprinting up to the glass, Harry began feeling around the edges of the frame. He could even hear barking from behind it!

"Harry..." a vaguely familiar voice called his name. "It's all right Harry, you can walk through now..."

"Mum?" he ventured incredulously. "Can you hear me?"

"Oh yes, Harry. We can hear everything now. Please come to us."

"How do I get through?" he asked.

“Just step through the mirror—that is all that’s required of you.”

Harry tried putting just the toe of his shoe in through the glass, but his long robes inhibited the action.

Closing his eyes, he reached out his hands in front of him and took a step through. It felt to him as if he had fallen down one stair; he stumbled and turned around to stabilise himself. Harry was now looking at the back of the Mirror of Erised. It was odd, as if one could never see the back of the object until they had stepped through to its magical side. Two of the four corners appeared to have squares removed from the otherwise perfectly rectangular sheet. It rippled before him like the surface of a bath.

Now Harry felt an arm around his shoulders and he looked up into the face of his father, James.

“Welcome back, son,” he said.

“Er, thanks,” Harry replied, still a bit daunted by his rush through the mirror. Padfoot seemed to have disintegrated into thin air.

Turning Harry around, Lily said, “Your father and I have been expecting you for quite some time now. We have a little celebration planned for your arrival.” The room they were in now was the Great Hall at school.

“Oh?” Harry replied to his mother. This was not the way he’d expected his parents to react to him. After all, the three of them hadn’t seen each other in around fifteen years. The behaviour was a bit...distant, considering. He still went along and followed after them regardless.

In front of them was a small table with a multi-tiered cake on it. It was covered in steel-grey icing and the candles on it burned a cold silvery colour.

The Potters began to sing, “Happy Death-day to you, Happy Death-day to you. Happy Death-day dear Harry, Happy Death-day to you.”

“Death-day?” Harry questioned them, aghast. “We’re celebrating the day I died?”

“Why yes,” James answered heartily, “it’s not everyday one can say they’ve died. This is your very first Death-day! You’ve even got some presents!”

“Presents?” whispered Harry, “for dying?”

“Yes!” said Lily, in the same excited tone as her husband. “And this one is from Sirius.” She held out a small square parcel, wrapped in ice-blue metallic paper. “He says to tell you he’s sorry for not making your party.”

“Oh.” In spite of himself, Harry reached for the gift and opened it.

Parting the tissue inside, he saw the box contained a very long black braid. Both ends of it were knotted off; it resembled a warrior’s queue. His godfather had given him corded human hair for his Death-day?

Feeling somewhat grossed-out, Harry reached inside and began to take the braid from its bed of tissue. As he did, Harry felt his own hair grow heavy and something long started snaking down the centre of his back. It startled him and he let go of Sirius’s odd gift from his hand.

Realising he was going to drop the braid, Harry lunged for it. But instead of catching it as he expected, a long thick cord whipped around from the back of Harry’s head. He froze and then felt along the back of his neck. Somehow, the braid had attached itself to the ends of his own hair rather than having been dropped in a coil on the floor. This whole thing was getting rather odd. He faced his parents again and looked at them weirdly; perhaps they had an explanation.

“Do you like it?” James asked expectantly. “Sirius thought you’d look rather dashing....” he trailed off, seeing the perplexed look on Harry’s face. “Very well, next gift!”

His mother held out a flat, wide present to him, wrapped in mint green with a silvery bow. “This one is from me.”

Harry slid off the bow and opened the lid of the box. It contained a silver quill and a matching silver diary.

“A diary?” asked Harry warily. “You want me to use a diary after I’m dead?”

“We don’t stop dreaming just because we’ve died, Harry. I should know. It would do you some good to write out your dreams and feelings today, not just of the dream world, but of the real world too.”

Putting the diary back in the box, he set it back on the table and fingered his new braid again. A Death Day Diary, read the cover of the little book. This morbid party was turning out even weirder than the one he’d attended for Nearly Headless Nick’s Death-day bash.

“Next gift!” cried James jovially. He produced a package from behind his back and presented it to Harry.

This one was very different from the depressing, muted tone gifts he’d received so far. The box was covered in every bright happy colour of the rainbow and had a plethora of ribbons atop it to match.

“That one’s from the Living World,” said Lily reverently. “Dead souls almost never see one of those,” she added as Harry carefully prised the ribbons and tape off the outside of the box.

Piqued with curiosity, he gently lifted the top off of the gift and peered inside.

What he saw heading the papers made him gasp, it was so unexpected.

“Official Certificate of Adoption,” he read aloud wonderingly, and glanced his full name in the first blank, “for Harry James Potter.” He gulped and swiftly looked back up at his parents.

“What does this mean?” Harry demanded desperately. “Who is this from?” Taking a step closer he finished forcefully, “Was someone going to adopt me?”

His parents' response was to laugh at him twitteringly. The Great Hall echoed with their voices.

"We've no idea what it means—" started James.

"—or who it's from," Lily went on, "and it doesn't matter anyway."

James and Lily started into an odd little waltz with each other, despite the absence of music. They looked utterly mad.

"Why doesn't it matter?" said Harry through clenched teeth. "I mean, I know I belong to you, but..."

Their reactions were really getting infuriating. Everything he found important seemed so trivial to them.

"Because you're dead now!" they cried together happily in singsong voices.

Being with Lily and James was a waste of time; he needed to get out of here and find some answers. Dead or alive. Making a sound of profound disgust, he cautiously put the cover back over the adoption papers and headed for the Mirror of Erised.

"You can't go back that way," said Lily in a hollow voice, sounding almost Trelawney-like.

She and James continued to dance their wild twirl; to music only they could hear.

"But you can use one of these," James concluded, in the same eerily echoing tone. Neither one of them paid him any more attention than that.

A small oblong box appeared in a sparkle near his feet on the stone floor. As Harry peered down at it, he could make out "Ollivanders—Makers of Fine Wands Since 362 B.C." and then the words, "Happy Death-Day Harry. Love, Dad." So this was his father's gift.

Bending down, he picked up the box and removed the cover. Inside was a polished black wand; it looked almost sinister compared to his old one. Harry looked at the side for the specs. It read "Phoenix Tail Feather, Yew, 13 ½ inches." He nearly dropped the box. His own father had just given him Lord Voldemort's wand!

The object in the box...the wand that had caused so much pain, suffering, and death...it practically bristled with evil power.

As if spellbound, Harry removed the black wand from its cushioning. Maybe this wasn't Riddle's; it probably just looked like it.

Dropping the box but still holding onto the gift with the adoption papers, he held the wand out in front of himself experimentally.

Before he could chant an incantation, a large popping sound filled the air around him and the Knight Bus came to a smooth halt in front of him.

But it wasn't the Knight Bus. It was still triple-decker, but instead of being violently purple it was ominous black and the burnt-out sign on the front read, "Fright Bus."

The door slid open without a sound and a familiar figure stepped out. Only it wasn't the person he'd expected. It was Aunt Petunia, and she was wearing black conductor's clothing. She began speaking crisply in monotone.

"Welcome to the Fright Bus, emergency transport for all stranded ghouls/ghosts/souls of the Undead World. Headquarters asks you remember that Poltergeists are banned. We have only a single destination; all trips are one-way. There is also no fare; please step lightly and don't disturb any of the other passengers." She gestured him impatiently up the stairs.

At this point, he appeared to have no choice where he went. With a last glance at his loony parents, Harry gathered himself and swept up the steps of the bus, forgotten braid swinging. Still his feet made no sound.

He was only half surprised to see Uncle Vernon in the driver's seat wearing the proper accoutrements. His uncle stared vacantly out the windscreen.

Harry realised he was rather glad his relatives had failed to acknowledge they knew him at this point, however. Conversation would be awkward at best.

Turning to his left, what he saw made him freeze in his tracks.

Instead of seats or beds, the aisle was now flanked with rows of coffins. Some had covers, other didn't. Had his hands not been full of wand and adoption papers, one would've flown to his mouth. Harry simply stared, aghast.

This whole thing was getting freakier as it went on. He came to the dawning realisation the creepy bus reeked of death and formaldehyde.

"Is there a problem?" demanded Conductor Petunia in irritation. "Perhaps you would care for different accommodations; we have sliding drawers on the second level—crypt on the right side, morgue on the left—we even stock toe-tags and keep the inside refrigerated to the temperature level of your choice—"

"No, this is fine," Harry interrupted with a strangled whisper, his jaw going more and more slack as Conductor Petunia spoke. He definitely did not want to hear more recitation on what else they had to make dead people more comfortable.

He began moving haltingly passed the coffins. The otherwise warmly lit oil lamps instead burned titanium silver. Harry noticed one of the black wood boxes near the back was occupied. Taking extra precaution to avoid that one, he skirted it and arranged himself, his belongings, and his robes about him on the floor. The thought of being in one of those coffins was driving him near spare. He just couldn't bring himself to do it.

Looking up, he noticed that the bus had already started moving. It was quite unlike the real Knight Bus; it didn't creak, roar, or produce any of the usual vomit-inducing motion. It just....glided.

This place is silent as the grave, thought Harry before he could stop himself.

Casting about for something to distract his present line of thinking, his eyes rested on the gift in his lap. He opened the cover of the adoption papers again. The signature lines were all blank. Damn.

Harry was aching to know what this meant; if indeed someone was planning to adopt him before he died. Evidently someone had cared for Harry so deeply they had desire to share not only their house with him, but also their finances, their security, themselves, their family—a real home. This was doubly meaningful to him, as it had come so close on the heels of Sirius's death. Now Harry felt adrift; as if he belonged nowhere and to no one.

Who better to ask than his own relatives? Harry knew he was a tad on the old side now, but it would be just like the Dursleys to put off such a big life-altering decision regarding him. Perhaps Harry had misjudged them somehow. He had to know.

Steeling himself, Harry called up to the front of the bus.

"Uncle Vernon. Aunt Petunia."

No answer.

"I need to ask you something, please."

Silence.

"Were you, erm..." This was harder than he'd thought. Harry tried again. "I was wondering...if you had been planning to...er, to officially adopt me?"

In spite of the situation, Harry carried a half-hopeful tone in his voice. After so many years he still couldn't help it. Simply put, adoption was

something nearly every orphan wanted despite their age; this was especially so if the child in question was resented or unwanted in their subsequent residence. Inside burns a void yearning to be filled with the assurance of belonging and inclusiveness. Even if it was to be in name only.

And for once, in this regard, an oft-deprived Harry was not the exception. "I have these papers here with my name on them."

He held the gift box up behind their backs. Still the Dursleys refused to turn around. Sighing somewhere between dejection and disgust, Harry put the papers back into the box and slid the lid back over it. He found himself hoping it wasn't the Dursleys names that belonged on the bottom of those precious documents. If their present behaviour was any indication...

Not caring how long he sat there, Harry thought himself into a boredom-induced stupor. He never assumed the netherworld would be all picnics and parades, but at the moment being dead was a right drag.

Coming to a hasty decision, Harry stood up and tucked the black wand into his robes and clutched the gift box under one arm. If the Dursleys weren't going to talk, he'd have to try the other passenger. Gulp.

Feeling rather bold, he sidled over to the occupied coffin. It contained just an ordinary witch, normal as you please, wearing black robes and looking as if she were sleeping. No, not sleeping. Her brow was wrinkled as if in concentration whilst her lips moved soundlessly.

"Hello," Harry said timidly as his voice cracked.

No response.

"Er, so—been dead long?" he tried again, picking up the volume a bit.

Dramatic irony abruptly hit Harry full force. This was stupid.

Newly dead, riding this weird bus with relatives who won't speak to me, and here I sound as if I'm trying to pick up chicks.

Suddenly, the witch's eyes snapped open and she bolted upright in her coffin.

Harry yelled a shocked "Aaaah!" as he jumped back reactively and nearly tripped over his robes.

Apparently one could get scared half to death, even in the afterlife.

Heart hammering in his chest (he still had a heart?), Harry attempted to stammer an apology.

"I, I'm really sorry—" he began breathlessly, "—I didn't intend to scream in your face, you just startled me—"

Her eyes flashed menacingly as she waved an arm. It contained a wand. She commenced shouting at him.

"No, I will not let you take him away!"

"Take who?" Harry tried to placate her before things got worse.

"TAKE HIM!" she raged, her hair flying, "I KNOW WHAT YOU'LL DO! He's injured, he needs my help..."

Conductor Petunia came out of nowhere and shoved him out of the way. "Didn't I tell you not to bother the other passengers?" she hissed.

Then to the raving witch, "There, there. He didn't mean anything by it, Adonna. That boy never could learn anything well. He's just barbaric, idiotic, and doesn't know the rules—didn't mean a thing by it."

The crazy woman shook convulsively. "He tried to kill me, kill US by breaking the Gemini Stasis Charm! He wants to destroy Harry Potter and me! I'll hurt him, I'll kill him!"

Why in blue blazes was this woman he had never met in his life shrieking his name?

Instantly she pointed her wand arm at Harry and shouted, “CRUCIO!”

He yelled as the spell hit his left forearm; he’d raised it automatically to defend himself. Looking down, he glimpsed his black velvet robes starting to stain. He was bleeding? The Cruciatus Curse didn’t work like this!

Harry looked back up just in time for the mad Adonna woman to shout “CRUCIO!” at him again. This time, the spell hit the side of his forehead. It blinded him for a bit; he raised a hand to his head where the spell had broken his glasses and caused a gout of warm liquid to rush out.

Reaching into his robes, Harry blindly tried to find the black wand as he began sprinting to the back of the bus. Time to get out of this horrible place...

“CRUCIO!” shouted Mad Adonna again as he stumbled.

Now, this one felt like the Cruciatus Curse.

His entire right side erupted in agony and he could hardly breathe. Still clutching the unused black wand, he took shuddering steps closer to the bus exit. Almost there!

Driver Vernon glared in his direction, but made no move to stop him.

Next Harry found himself tripping down the stairs. But he needed something to open the door!

As he turned around and pointed his wand at the door opener behind him, the Cruciatus Curse hit him a fourth and final time in his left shoulder.

“ALOHOMORA!” Harry shouted loudly as the painful green light lanced through him.

The doors flew open in a rush and Harry flung himself off the steps without a second thought.

Uncle Vernon was shouting, "Good riddance, you ungrateful prat! We always knew you were trouble! You never were welcome here, remember that! And don't come back!"

Harry landed hard, but thankfully his full set of robes cushioned his fall somewhat. His new braid was tangled around the wand still gripped in his hand. This rope of hair was quite likely what had prevented him from losing the wand in the first place. Quickly Harry untangled the thing and stashed the wand in the front pocket of his robes.

As he stood up, Harry gratefully realised he was none the worse for wear. Everything the crazy Adonna person had done to him seemed to have reversed itself after his leap from the Fright Bus. He even had his glasses back on. Belatedly, Harry remembered he'd abandoned the adoption papers on the bus. His heart sank. It's not like I'll need them anyway, he tried to convince himself.

Looking down, he got another start.

The stain on the arm of his robes! Instead of being red as it should, it was tinted silver... like Unicorn blood. Do dead people bleed Elixir of Life? he contemplated insanely.

Harry looked around and saw for the first time that he had landed at King's Cross Station, Platform 9 3/4. But he was the only soul there. The entire cavernous structure was silent and devoid of all internal light or activity. Moonlight shown through the glass and the rafters as he walked.

Unexpectedly, a fluttering noise whizzed passed his ear.

"Hedwig!" called Harry in delight as he recognised his messenger friend. His heart lifted at the sight of her.

She turned in midair and hooted, as if beckoning him to follow. At least she can see me!

Picking up his pace, he gave chase to his snowy owl as she winged through the building and for the open exit. Harry noticed immediately

the soles of his shoes lightly striking against the floor in a cacophony of satisfying pounding; they echoed merrily throughout the Station.

He continued on after Hedwig flew out the entryway. Harry noticed that the city outside the building was just as dark and deserted as King's Cross, but he didn't care. After all, he and his pet were having fun. Determined to enjoy this moment, Harry let his feet fly as his robes billowed around him in a dark cloud.

Once again, he wasn't even getting tired for all the running.

On and on Hedwig soared, through the car park, over rooftops, leading Harry through the dank and dreary streets of a vacant London. Their only lighting was the moon and street torches. Every so often, Harry would call out a greeting to her, and she would invariably answer back.

It sure was good to have a friend, someone who could see and talk with him—even if she wasn't human.

Hedwig swooped down at last, and he watched as she flew in through the trees of a park some ways ahead of him.

No, not a park, Harry realised the closer he walked. A graveyard.

All of Harry's joy at seeing Hedwig again fell to the earth with a dull thud.

Of course, what were you expecting, he thought grimly, the Quidditch Pitch?

From somewhere close by, Harry heard someone weeping. He paused, concentrating. No, several people were weeping. Together. Entranced, he followed the sound.

A large group of witches and wizards was gathered together around an equally large headstone in the garish moonlight.

Harry recognised each and every one of them. They were his friends, classmates, and teachers from school and around the wizarding

world. All of them looked so profoundly saddened, but none more than the Weasleys and Hermione, who were standing directly in front.

No one noticed him.

Walking up to the head of the solemn crowd, he could make out the epitaph inscribed on the granite:

Harry James Potter
Wizard Interred Therein
A Mere Age 15

Born: 31, July 1980
Died: 2, July 1996

Known to All
Feared by Many
Loved by No One

Seeing it all stamped out in front of him somehow made his death more final than ever. Harsh reality swarmed around him as a black plague.

“It was his ‘saving people thing’,” he heard Hermione wail piteously, “I knew it would kill him someday!”

At least I died saving someone, he thought dourly. Better that than something meaningless, like a car accident.

Harry vaguely remembered wanting to comfort his friends, but what could he do? He was dead. And he already knew they wouldn’t be able to see him; this was due from experience with his godfather. Being around this level of perpetual grief just....hurt too much.

Numbly, he began plodding away from the group and skirted around the gravestone.

Someone was crying alone on the other side of it, unnoticed by the crowd. Someone female and petite with long red hair. Someone was Ginny Weasley. She was sobbing bitterly to Hedwig, who had

perched on her knee. Harry had never thought it possible that someone so small could tremble so violently.

“I needed to tell him, but never got the chance!” Ginny cried into her cupped hands. Hedwig hooted consolingly.

“Harry just didn’t understand we already knew! All of us! Even Percy knew! We knew it wasn’t him, wasn’t his fault!” Hedwig turned to gaze meaningfully at him.

In spite of himself, Harry was intently listening to all Ginny said. What was she talking about? Was it something he already heard of? All of who knew all of what?

Ginny thrust her chin in the air and the back of her head brutally struck the headstone. Appalled, Harry grabbed the back of his own head in sympathy and leapt backward. He watched, dumbfounded, as she cried ever harder, lump on the back of her head forgotten. Hedwig tried to nip her fingers in a comforting way.

“But it was me who had to let him know! I was supposed to tell him!”

Harry drew closer to her. Whatever it was she’d been referring to, it was obviously very important that she would’ve let him know. Ginny was certainly appearing to take his death much harder than the rest of them.

“And now he’s dead, thinking he doesn’t deserve love, and with the burden of guilt!”

Harry winced at this display of such raw emotion. Ginny was now yelling herself hoarse, she felt so terrible. Hedwig hooted dolefully with Ginny in commiseration. A knot formed in his chest as he observed the distraught red-haired girl. Her depth of pain was almost unbearable to witness.

Because Harry recognised something. Not only was she hurting so badly, but her infinite ache inside was the hurting for him.

And there was nothing he could do about it. Nothing he could do to comfort her; nothing he could do to console the entire lot of his mourning friends.

All of that powerlessness made the hurt inside him build, too.

At least when he was alive, he could embrace his friends or lend a compassionate ear. Harry could feel his face screwing up with the anguish of not helping. His eyes burned.

Ginny stopped keening into the sky and looked directly at Hedwig.

“But worst of all,” she whispered, eyes glistening, “I never once thanked him for saving my life in the Chamber of Secrets.” She squeezed her eyes tight shut and continued.

“As I awoke, Harry was leaning over me protectively. I could see he was fevered and ill—and noticed the bloody basilisk bite on his arm through his torn robes. I pointed it out and watched as he hastily hid it from my sight.” Ginny covered her eyes with her hands, as if to demonstrate. Hedwig fluttered to the ground in front of her.

It had been so long since Harry had recounted that fateful night, but he could still summon thoughts as if it happened day before.

“After that, I knew he was going to die. I glanced at his face; he knew it too. But instead of being selfish and demanding I stay, he insisted I get myself to safety. No regard for himself whatsoever.” Ginny’s eyes swam.

Harry’s burning eyes pricked with hot tears. Once again, he’d forgotten that he wasn’t the only one altered by the course of events leading up to and including that night.

“I never told him I’d figured out the real reason he wanted to send me away from him after I woke up.” Ginny paused painfully.

Harry drew a sharp intake of breath. He’d never told a soul the actual answer to this. It was something that he scarcely acknowledged within himself. Could she really know why?

“It was because of his compassion. At twelve years of age, he had already lost his childhood innocence, and had no desire to see the same happen to me. Despite only vague memories, Harry knew he’d watched it happen to his parents—and couldn’t bring himself to ask me to stay with him—“ she was choking on her words—“to watch him...die. A final self-sacrificing act—to be alone when he needed a friend the most. I couldn’t have felt more love and concern from him if he was my own brother.”

Ginny buried her face in her arms and cried anew after finishing her confession.

It was like she said—Ginny did know. Through some unfathomable reasoning, she had discerned the true motivation behind why Harry tried to send her from him in that Chamber. She’d just so eloquently put the words to something he could’ve never expressed on his own.

More than death itself, Harry couldn’t stand the thought of anyone watching him go through the process. Especially now after the dementors and Cedric and Sirius—anything that brought back death memory full bore. Watching said events irrevocably changes the once-innocent who witness them. It was tainted psychological torture for anyone who watched a loved one die.

Harry could feel stinging tears coursing down his cheeks unbidden and splashing on his robes in response to Ginny’s lament.

This really was too much. Not being able to let this sweet girl know she was heard...how grateful he was for her now...that he finally understood her...

If she was feeling so distraught, just think of how Hermione’s doing. Or Ron. Or Mrs. Weasley. He unconsciously wiped his wet eyes with the silver-stained fingers of his hands and moved closer to Ginny.

Her poor small body was wracked with sobs once more. Harry also noticed her hair had a strip of a darker crimson colour down the back. Apparently, her head had hit the gravestone with enough force to draw blood. Oh, Merlin’s Mercy...

Forgetting himself, Harry knelt down on the ground next to her. He reached out as if to touch the back of Ginny's red hair and pantomimed the stroking motion instead. Some of her blood got on his hands as he brushed the headstone.

Harry tried placating the both of them by quietly saying things to her.

"It's all right," he said hoarsely, trying not to cry, himself. "I'm here and listening, and I heard you." Closing his eyes, he ploughed on. "And yes, that was the reason I'd wanted you to leave. I know—death—entirely too well."

As he went on, Ginny's crying subsided and her breathing gradually grew more even under his feigned physical ministrations. He fancied it was actually helping rather than the fact she'd probably just tired herself out to exhaustion.

Then, "Harry?" she asked wonderingly from under her curtain of copper hair.

Harry froze. She said the question without fear, only awe. Was Ginny talking in her sleep?

Silence reigned for several moments. Still he stayed with her, more out of the requirements for familiarity and human companionship than anything else. They had both felt so isolated in the world. Apparently, even dead people got lonely.

Folding his arms about his knees, Harry found himself wanting to talk again. But what to talk about? Just keep speaking, he told himself, after all it's the only thing you've got. Thinking he'd have nothing to say, he babbled rather aimlessly instead.

"I really miss you, Hermione and Ron and the Order, and the D.A. Oh yeah, and you can still get scared out of your mind, even if you're deceased. Another tip: Make sure one of your Death-day gifts is a wand. You can't get anywhere without it. Other dead people can also have fits and start cursing you through their insanity. In fact, I haven't found anything good about being dead, except I get to hear things when people don't know I'm around. But I'd wager I can even do that better with an Invisibility Cloak."

Ginny suddenly started shaking again. Was she sleep-crying?

A giggle of laughter escaped her. She slowly raised her head and looked in his direction. "It really is you!" she exclaimed delightedly. No fear whatsoever.

Harry stared at her in astonishment. "You can see and hear me? A dead person? And you're not afraid?"

"Why should I be afraid?" she asked, perplexed. "I thought I was dreaming. I dream about you loads." Ginny blushed and continued, "Besides, you're my friend, Harry Potter. I owe you my life and I know you would never deliberately hurt me."

Nice qualifier, "deliberately". He'd have to give her that one. Ten points to Slytherin, he thought at her appreciatively.

Tossing her a wan smile Harry said, “Well, thanks for the vote of confidence, Gin.”

She growled good-naturedly and faux-socked him in the arm. Ten points to Gryffindor, he half smiled in satisfaction to himself.

“You know I hate that nickname. I could call you something equally obnoxious in retaliation, like ‘Scary Aims Potty.’”

Harry’s eyebrows shot straight to his hairline. That was a good one. Brilliant in fact. Slytherin scores, double goal. Now for the snappy comeback?

“Yes, but you’d have to stop me before I threw you in a cocktail glass with a splash of vermouth and a lurid green olive.”

Ginny’s eyes narrowed warningly. Another ten for me.

“That is what the M of your middle name stands for is it not? Martini?” he went on, pushing his luck. Gryffindor Seeker dodges Bludger.

Her mouth was agape now—she was choking on her indignation. Teams are now neck-and-neck. Why not go for the game?

“Yes,” he continued as if addressing a pub tender, “I’d like a Ginny Martini Weasley—shaken, not stirred.”

She could hold back no longer and burst forth with raucous laughter as he finished. Harry Potter has caught the Snitch. Gryffindor wins!

It sure felt good to see her laughing again—indeed, it was how he was used to seeing Ginny.

“It’s a good thing—my dad has—told us about—Muggle cinema!” she gasped out between giggles. She gradually started breathing regularly again.

“Elsewise your James Bond joke would fall flatter than stale butterbeer,” she finished, smirking and cocking an eyebrow measuringly.

But he hadn't known any James Bond jokes.

Suddenly it struck Harry how very strange their perfectly natural exchange was. They gazed at each other a moment contemplatively. No time like the present to ask, he gave in ruefully.

"Why is it—d'you suppose—we're able to have a normal one-on-one conversation now I'm no longer alive?" His brow wrinkled and Ginny rested her chin on one hand, thinking.

"I'd wager a big answer to that is time. Living people just take for granted things they'd rather not deal with can be put off till tomorrow. Comfort zone stuff," she added, glancing at him.

That was certainly true enough. Harry couldn't begin to count the number of times he'd given schedules and people the brush-off, assuming he could always get to them later. How very wrong he'd been.

"Any other thoughts about it?" he asked, having nothing to add yet.

"The influence of other people," Ginny added after a beat. "Peer pressure, professor pressure, parental—all mixes in—and can make you do things you'd never even consider doing in your right mind. Good or bad."

Then she turned and looked at him darkly.

"And I refuse to even discuss external mental influence," she pointed to his scar, "as we both know only too well."

"Tell me about it," he answered, as they sat in companionable silence and again commiserated on experiences only the other could understand.

"And a third thing," Ginny spoke up again, "is emotions or stubbornness in general." Looking at him apologetically, she continued, "Here's one example. Confidentially, I know I've got a problem with saying what I really mean to say. I just—I dunno." She

wrung her hands together. “Whenever I feel uncomfortable, bored, or scared—or sometimes for no reason at all—something sarcastic flies out of my mouth.”

“No, I know what you mean,” Harry joined in. “It’s like when you say something humourous, it deflates an otherwise tense situation. It just—” he abruptly stopped, lost for words.

“—makes it—” Ginny supplied.

“—feel better,” they ended together. They looked at each other and nodded shyly.

“Although not always,” amended Ginny, wrinkling her nose in distaste.

“How do you mean?”

“Er, it’s not exactly inspiring when instead of saying, “I love you Percy”, the words ‘get out of my life forever you miserable, loathsome, evil, pathetic, glory-seeking pragidiot’ comes roaring out of your mouth instead.”

“Hrm. I would reckon not,” Harry deadpanned. He backtracked though. “Pragidiot?”

Ginny grinned hugely. “It’s a term I’ve fashioned just for Percy. Means ‘prig’, ‘prat’, ‘git’, and ‘idiot’ all in one go. Describes him to a tee, don’t you think?”

“Quite brilliantly, I daresay,” Harry sniggered and applauded shook his head at himself.

“There I go again,” he said aloud, “being sarcastic. Why did I hardly ever do this before? Why am I doing it now? I mean, it’s one thing to think stuff at people, but another thing entirely to actually do or say it out loud...” he trailed off, flourishing a hand in the air.

“Personally, I like to think it’s us Weasleys still exerting our wicked influence over you,” said Ginny, smiling.

“All joking aside Harry, it’s a defence mechanism,” she explained. It occurred to him how very much like Hermione she had just sounded. He closed his eyes, imagining wistfully.

“It’s something that mentally clicks in place when you feel conversationally threatened at all. You’re scared people will mock or ridicule what you really think, so you say something completely oddball to throw them off the track instead. Generally, the more rubbish you experience, the more sarcastic you become. Godric knows you’ve been through the ringer, Harry. You’ve got a right to be more sarcastic than any of us put together. That way, you can insure nobody will have monopolistic knowledge of the real you.” She stopped to let it all sink in.

Was that really why he acted the part of prat sometimes? He didn’t want anyone to know the real him? It was odd to contemplate that he was so leery of people. However, he’d had good reason to be suspicious of others for a very long time. So weirdly enough, it all made sense. Only, how did Ginny know all of this?

“Hey, how d’you know all this stuff?” Harry blurted, nonplussed. If he was being rude, she took no notice. Quite the contrary—she was ready for a reply.

“Sarcasm is a common character trait amongst orphans and youngest members of families,” she gave him a tight smile. “In other words, people who are constantly strong-armed or bullied by others around them. I’m the youngest girl so I know something of it; you’re both orphan and youngest. Mystery solved, case closed,” she finished kindly, and clasped her hands together for emphasis.

Harry sighed. “Well, I suppose that tears it. Something about my behaviour is “normal”; I’m a sarcastic berk, but it’s typical, considering. I’m not nearly as good at it as Fred and George, though. Or Ron. Or even you for that matter. All you younger Weasleys—“

“Nobody is as good as Fred and George,” Ginny cut in solemnly. “They were born at hospital whilst telling dead baby jokes from the womb to surrounding medical staff. Mum was mortified.”

Slapping a hand upon his fringe, Harry shook his head and laughed again.

“How do you do that?”

“I think it’s the hair,” she responded immediately, not even a second later. “So, how do you do that?” Ginny tossed back at him.

“Do what?” he crinkled his brow.

“Here I am alone; feeling the worst I have in my entire life. Crying my eyes out and fearing I would never see you again.”

She paused; Harry waited uneasily.

“And lo and behold, the person I’ve felt the worst for shows up in front of my very eyes once more. Only he doesn’t do it for himself. Oh no.”

Shaking her head she went on, “It’s to cheer me up and make sure I’m all right, even after he’s gone.” Ginny paused and smiled at him serenely. “But banging on about your dreadful experiences in the afterlife—” she closed her eyes and giggled—“really takes the cake, though.”

Harry cleared his throat and smiled in an embarrassed fashion. Apparently some topics were always uncomfortable, regardless of when and where you were.

“Part and parcel of my ‘saving people thing’, I guess,” he responded in a subdued voice, running a hand over his hair self-consciously. Oh yeah. His braid. Flinging it over his shoulder, he began to study it again.

“Spiffing new ‘do,” Ginny said lightly, “but I can’t say it’s really you though, no offence. ‘Just Quidditched’ is more the universally recognised Harry Potter style.” He snorted darkly at her and rolled his eyes.

“Thanks loads, ol’ chum. Anyway, I wouldn’t know how it looked. I haven’t seen my reflection since before I got it. Feels pretty stupid

and conspicuous, however.” He shook his head resignedly. “You wouldn’t believe where I picked it up, though,” Harry went on conversationally.

“Oh, I already know the answer to that,” Ginny answered, nodding. “It’s quite obvious.”

He looked at her sharply, wondering if she were kidding around again. But she gazed back at him unblinkingly.

“All right,” Harry challenged. “How can you possibly know that?”

“I can know—” she turned and reached under her robes on the grass—“because of this.”

Harry gaped at the object in her hands. She was holding the very gift box that had contained his adoption documentation!

“Where did you find that?” Harry breathed.

Now it was Ginny’s turn to be astonished. “You know what this is?” she demanded. “The documents inside?”

He looked at her suspiciously. “Why shouldn’t I know?” Harry replied, puzzled. Yes—it’s the adoption cert with my name on it. I’ve come across it here. My...parents gave it to me. Said it was a gift from the living world. You see, they wouldn’t answer any questions I had about it—the signature lines were blank, so I haven’t any idea who started filling out those papers. I accidentally left the things behind, though.” Then he repeated, “Where did you find it?” Ginny’s eyes were shining brightly, as if she couldn’t wait to tell him.

“Correction: it found us. Came straight to Grimmauld Place from the Ministry of Magic, addressee Mssr. M.M.M. Obviously somebody didn’t want it tracked in case it was intercepted.”

“Somebody else? On my adoption papers? I thought there were only four Marauders. Who’s Mssr. M.M.M.?” Harry was even more mystified.

“That’s what Dumbledore and the Order wondered, at first. Then they quickly discerned those names from the envelope, from the names on the documents, with who was known in or around the Order. This “mystery marauder” was logically someone who knew about Grimmauld Place, and the connection between you and Sirius. You see, unlike the ones you saw, these papers are signed.”

Harry’s heart was pounding now. Signed documents! Finally he could solve the mystery...

“Who’s on it?” whispered Harry in a hushed voice. “Who wanted to adopt...me?”

“Besides the official witnesses—who are now deceased, the only four names listed are Petunia and Vernon Dursley as former legal guardians, Sirius Black as present legal guardian, and yourself.”

That hit Harry full force. A warm feeling shot through his heart as he realised it was his godfather himself who had wanted to adopt him, and cared enough to make their small family official. Somehow, Sirius had managed to fill out the papers while in hiding....

Harry even understood why Sirius would keep something like that quiet—didn't want to put his godson in danger whilst he was still a wanted criminal. For a moment, Harry couldn't speak because he felt so touched. But something darker penetrated his reverie....

"Petunia and Vernon Dursley?" repeated Harry angrily back to Ginny. "They lied to me again. This means they've known for ages about the existence of Sirius Black. You know, those papers are just hardcore proof of how they've tried to rid themselves of their evil wizard nephew." He sneered and said, "I suspect the only thing stopping it from really happening was Dumbledore's Howler to Aunt Petunia. Why are they forever keeping things from me?" Harry jumped up and started pacing as his braid swung annoyingly about him. He tried brushing it aside in irritation and failed.

Ginny observed him in silence. "Quite obviously, you never looked at the date next to the signatures. Surely you realise even in the magic world nobody would transfer guardianship of a minor to a fugitive criminal?" she asked shrewdly. He swallowed.

"Actually, that sort of slipped my mind...."

"I see. No matter. Harry, these elusive documents were signed one day before your godfather was convicted and sent to rot in Azkaban Prison." Her statement hung in the air.

That was so very long ago...and it didn't make sense. Dumbledore had told him just recently the reason he'd had to stay with the loathsome Dursleys; why after he'd finally escaped ten endless years of neglect and abuse only to require returning once every subsequent year. It was that blasted blood protection thing.

"Why would Sirius sign adoption papers for me? I mean, I'm sure he knew the reason behind Professor Dumbledore's keeping me there..."

“Oh yes, he was quite aware of that,” Ginny confirmed. “However, Sirius went as Padfoot to see for himself just what type of environment you’d be raised in on Privet Drive.” Raising an eyebrow, she continued, “Needless to say, he was livid. After finding Dumbledore, Sirius lit into him about all that was wrong about leaving you there; how the professor was a prehistoric blithering imbecile with all the empathy of a sack of wet dung, how he was going to teach the Dursleys a lesson by hexing Dudley, and how he was going to rescue you from that hell on earth if it required going so deep into hiding that not even Mighty Merlin and his seven blind Dwarves would be able to find you with a radio telescope.” Both her eyebrows were arched high now. “Their row was the stuff of legend,” she finished in a storyteller voice.

Hearing this news left Harry beside himself. The fact that Sirius had cared for and defended him from such an early stage...and verbally hazed the Headmaster of Hogwarts to prove it! But still...hearing this from Ginny and all....

“And don’t give me that look,” Ginny said irritably, “the reason I know this stuff about Sirius is because Dumbledore himself confirmed their fight. Evidently, Sirius went to Privet Drive posing as some sort of custodial official—so that’s why they never knew about your godfather. He’d got the Dursleys to sign the papers, and was all set to pick you up—all with Dumbledore’s knowledge. Your godfather was never aware that he knew. Dumbledore was set to intercept Sirius—when Sirius was supposed to pick you up—but of course that was the night he bumped into Wormtail,” Ginny finished with a rueful look on her face.

Despite the talk of Wormtail, this was very heartening! At last, someone who had fought to remove Harry from the horrid sentence of his relatives’ dark domain...and the method Sirius had employed was just so....like him. Harry had no trouble picturing Black display the pure nerve required to defy the omniscient Headmaster of Hogwarts...and his godfather had done it all for him. Harry smiled broadly in spite of himself.

As Ginny watched him, she returned his look knowingly. "It's good to know Sirius took the role of godfather literally, isn't it?" Her eyes twinkled. "He always was the defiant sort, doing things his own way regardless of outcome...rushing in where wizards fear to tread...and for all that happened in his life, you were always his number one priority."

A warm feeling filled Harry at her words. Yes, he had always been his godfather's priority...even when he was in Azkaban, Sirius was thinking about him.... Harry was the reason Sirius was dead in the first place...don't think about it....

"I hate to interrupt your thoughts, but there's still loads to tell you," Ginny said softly.

Harry faced her almost reluctantly. It was always nice to have positive thoughts of Sirius...

"Another reason I know some of these things is the note left in the box with the adoption papers. It explained near everything behind the documents' history; save for how they came to be at Black's house or precisely who sent them. Apparently someone at the Ministry sealed the documentation in the Department of Mysteries hoping the papers would never be found. See, in the wizard world, certs like these have the strongest protective Impervious Charms put on them so they can't be destroyed," she explained.

"And yet somehow, they wound up at Grimmauld Place sent to Mssr. M.M.M.," Harry prompted. "You said the Order figured out who that was?"

"Yes," said Ginny hastily. "Essentially it was Tonks who figured out the second part of the clue—after Mssr. of course. She pointed out to everyone that the letters M-M-M are an acronym the Ministry of Magic uses to classify Metamorphmagi in their registry."

Harry studied Ginny intently. "But Tonks is the only Metamorph even remotely affiliated with the Order, isn't she? I mean, she told me they were very rare."

"We all thought so too. Only, it turns out she was the only known Metamorph among us." Ginny pursed her lips and stared at him.

He puzzled this out. "So, there is someone else then? Undercover or something?"

"Actually, there was someone else," she corrected very deliberately, "but he's no longer with us." No longer with us? Was she implying...

"Sirius was Animagus and Metamorph?" demanded Harry incredulously, "and he never told anyone!"

Ginny shook her head. "No, sorry—you misunderstand. This person wasn't even aware of the ability before his untimely death." Suddenly her statements were clear to him. She couldn't possibly mean...

"Not...me?" he whispered, shocked.

"Yes Harry—you," said Ginny intently.

"No, maybe it was Sirius...he might've..." Harry gestured aimlessly, "...how is this possible? Tonks told me Metamorphs are born and that you can't study to be one or...or...." he trailed off, at a loss.

"That I can't tell you," Ginny replied, truly apologetic. "But you're aware it was part of the evidence used to convict you."

"What did you say?" asked Harry. "'Convict'? More Ministry rubbish trying to get me chucked out of school with manufactured spells, I assume?"

Ginny just gaped at him openly for a bit and then practically shouted, "You mean you don't know!" Now she was positively horror-struck.

Harry cast about uneasily, feeding on Ginny's fear. Her reaction to his simple inquiry had unnerved him. Nonplussed to silence, Harry simply gazed back at her.

Ginny was assuming an air of weeping again. But he watched her face; she gritted her teeth and clenched her fists, as if coming to a

stiff resolve. When she spoke, her eyes were moist, but her voice was steady.

“Harry. Please sit.”

Warily, he did as he was told.

“You, your cousin Dudley, Aunt Petunia, and Uncle Vernon all got into a violent car crash in London. It happened straight after you left King’s Cross Station together; the Hogwarts Express had just arrived from school to drop the students off for summer holiday. You were all found, severely injured, in a park outside central London. You were also the only one conscious when they came across you. Evidently, Harry, you had extracted yourself from a vehicle that had rolled several times downhill. Getting out was something you would’ve had to do under your own power, as nobody had known where you were and your wand was irreparably broken.”

Inexplicably, Harry’s mind began violently spinning at the mention of his wand.... He had a memory flash and pictured himself in a shirt sling, pounding head, covered in red patches, twisting a munged black wire around his bloodstained broken wand...a lighting flash of energy passing through him as he held the damaged wand to the sky...

Harry whipped around to Ginny and desperately whispered, “The Knight Bus! I remember that...I swear I saw it come! Did the wand work? Did I get us help on time? Please tell me I was able to save them, Ginny!” he finished on a hoarse shout.

In response, Ginny closed her eyes shut tight and a large tear leaked out from under each eyelid.

“You’ve no idea how good it is to hear you say that,” Ginny whispered painfully. “The things people have been saying about your vindictive homicidal nature...we knew you couldn’t have...” she stopped abruptly and snapped her head up to look intently into Harry’s eyes.

“Yes. Your quick thinking, resourcefulness, and inability to give up in the face of impossible odds saved the Dursleys—all of them.” She said it carried on a tone of subdued pride.

Harry ran a hand over his eyes and heaved a great sigh of relief.

“At least I was able to get them help, even if I was evidently too late for myself. That’s....that’s all that matters, isn’t it?” he said it so uncertainly, it almost sounded like a child needing reassurance from a parent.

Ginny studied him almost pityingly. “That very act is what quite likely proved your undoing,” she answered. It wasn’t at all what he’d expected her to say.

“Meaning what?” said Harry sharply.

“Harry, I know this will be nigh impossible to tolerate, but please allow me to explain what happened with a minimum of interruptions. I’ll try and answer all of your questions, but please remember the order of events is very important.”

He narrowed his eyes at her and folded his arms tightly. “Very well.”

“When you and the Dursleys were found,” she began without preamble, “all of you and the car you were in had been turned invisible. Only a very clever and shrewd healer riding the Knight Bus discerned your dilemma; that you were hurt and needed help to undo the charms because of a broken wand.”

Harry winced in remembrance at the mention of the healer...imagined not being able to breathe...a tall dark-haired woman speaking soothingly to him....

“Madam Adonna,” he blurted, pleasantly surprised he remembered that detail.

“Exactly—Madam Adonna,” Ginny said, impressed. “After she sent you inside the bus to sit, she began helping the unconscious Dursleys.

Only she was intercepted due to the sudden arrival of Muggle law enforcement.”

“Oh yeah—the Met!” Harry shouted, remembering the uniformed officers. “I recall Madam Adonna being very angry....” he trailed off.

“Yes. And as she helped you, other witches and wizards who were on the Knight Bus removed your belongings from the boot of the car and found your wand and brought the whole lot to Ministry for safekeeping.” She paused only for breath and went on.

“As she spoke to you, it became evident to her you simply did not look yourself—barring all your injuries. She’d learnt from Stan that your hair was the wrong length. When you were found, it was unnaturally long—“ Harry grabbed his braid, “—and from you she learnt that your eyes appeared the wrong colour.”

“She’d said my eyes were grey,” remembered Harry, puzzled.

“Too right,” answered Ginny. “At the time, you were under too much trauma, so she decided not to tell you what she’d discerned due to these dramatic changes of appearance,” she gave Harry a hard look.

It hit him as a load of bricks.

“That I am—was—really a Metamorphmagus?”

“Bravo, Harry. Don’t ask me how you are, I’m not an expert—but somehow it happened. Only just when Madam Adonna thought she’d got your injuries all sorted out—in front of Muggles on the way to Muggle hospital—it became apparent you’d had major ones that were overlooked. Injuries that were so severe, there is no way you should’ve remained conscious, let alone upright and conversing. The fight in you just wouldn’t give up. Madam Adonna said she’s never seen anything like it, Muggle or magical.”

Harry shook himself...he was remembering the witch setting his shoulder, followed by the unbearable stabbing sensation along his right side.

“Something happened when she and Stan set my shoulder,” supplied Harry as he rubbed his ribcage, “and suddenly I couldn’t breathe.” He paused, concentrating. “Madam Adonna freaked out after she Vanished my shirt and looked under it, but I think I fainted before I could ask...what...she...saw...,” he gestured helplessly.

Ginny rushed ahead. “That’s because Madam had seen you with gigantic contusions all along your entire right side. Spreading over your ribcage were huge, ugly black and purple bruises.”

He whirled and looked at Ginny. “Just before I blacked out, I swear I remember someone saying ‘emergency surgery’ and ‘massive internal injuries’...” recalled Harry, aghast.

Looking at him with luminous eyes, Ginny continued, “You had fought your way out of that wretched vehicle with a broken collarbone, separated shoulder, moderate concussion, multiple lacerations from flying objects, a ruptured appendix, bruised liver, perforated lung, and three broken ribs.”

Dumbstruck, he simply stared at her. But how could he have been hurt so badly? Wasn’t he wearing a seatbelt? “How did I get so many injuries, Ginny? I was even wearing a seatbelt.”

Ginny took a deep breath. “Apparently, something impacted your right side whilst the car was rolling downhill.”

He narrowed his eyes. “The only thing I remember hitting me was Dudley...but that did hurt terribly...don’t tell me he...?” The thought that Dudley’s slamming into him had been the ultimate reason for his death...was horrifically ironic. The fact that Harry was dead whilst the Dursleys were still alive... “But didn’t I make it through the initial accident...?” he asked, shocked.

“Yes, I know,” Ginny commiserated his reaction, “nobody should survive that type of injury for so long—but you actually did quite well—until Madam Adonna turned your shoulder and a broken rib poked a hole through your lung.”

“Wait a minute, so it’s her fault I—“ Harry started in angrily.

“No, Harry. It’s not Madam Adonna’s fault that anything happened to you. That would be whomever put the illegal charms on the vehicle, you, and your family,” cut across Ginny sternly.

For some odd reason, he felt a surge of loathing pass through him at Madam Adonna anyway.

“But obviously she’s the one who’d moved me around too much—

“And she’s also the one who put her own self in peril to save your life,” Ginny headed him off crossly.

“What?” Harry’s voice rose testily at being interrupted again.

“That’s right, Mr. Potter. After realising how close to death you were—and trying at all costs to keep you out of the Muggle operating theatre—that horrible witch performed the Gemini Stasis Charm on you,” she pursed her lips at him as her eyes flashed. She’d looked so much like Molly Weasley, Harry merely blinked up at her for a moment.

“And what the blazes is that charm thingy?” Harry asked forcefully, having suddenly remembered he was supposed to be angry.

“It is a charm that can only be used by healers from one Metamorph to another—and you and Madam Adonna both happened to be Metamorphs,” she stopped.

“Meaning?” he gestured, quite impatient for her to be going on with.

“Meaning that it was a highly dangerous thing she put herself through trying to save you! The regular Stasis Charm is used on Metamorphs to keep their abilities in check if they go awry. Sometimes, whilst sick, the physical transformations are uncontrollable and it becomes painful and a bit of a headache. Tonks even said Potions are ineffective for treatment as they wear off too quickly. But the charm stabilises those transformations and causes them to remain dormant until it’s removed. A sort of “stasis”, if you will,” Ginny paused again.

“And the Gemini part?” asked Harry, forgetting to be angry in spite of himself. This sounded intriguing.

“That’s where it gets complicated. Metamorphs can naturally assume appearance of another person; it takes practise and patience, but they can do it. But the Gemini Stasis Charm goes several stages deeper. It allows a Metamorph to not only mimic the outward physical attributes of another, but also their internal condition as well—physical, psychological, emotional.” Ginny cocked an eyebrow meaningfully.

No longer agitated, Harry now gave her his full attention. “The effects you’re describing sound much like Polyjuice Potion.” He narrowed his eyes in concentration. “But are you saying—by means of that spell between two Metamorphs—Madam Adonna somehow bonded the two of us—“

“Quite, Harry. That’s what ‘Gemini’ itself means—twins—and that is the eloquence of the charm. Madam Adonna used her gift combined with the Stasis Charm to transfer her stronger, healthier life force in effort to stabilise your broken, dying body.” Ginny observed him kindly now.

Harry’s eyes widened and an odd sensation filled his chest.

“Not only that,” Ginny went on, “that charm is so highly dangerous and unpredictable for those involved, the Ministry of Magical Medicine has banned it. Madam Adonna lost her Healer’s license for at least a year after the Tribunal decided against her ‘reckless and irresponsible’ choice of action to help you.”

Now feeling properly guilty, Harry put a hand to his mouth in consideration. Madam Adonna, a witch he had never known before that fateful night, had risked not only her very life for him, but her livelihood as well. And all for a charm that hadn’t even worked. He found himself wishing it had, even if it was merely to exonerate the healer. Shame washed over him in waves as he realised he’d so severely misjudged her.

“After performing the charm on the both of you, you and Madam Adonna lie unconscious for three days—her efforts to keep you out of surgery were successful, too. Evidently the charm is a type of trance and people need to come out of it on their own,” Ginny now got a dark look about her. “But the Tribunal was forced by the blasted Ministry of Magic to take action as they wanted quick answers to how the accident was caused. Such as how the Muggles became involved, what sort of actions Madam Adonna took after arriving on the scene, and why,” she went on disgustedly. “Apparently, secondhand testimony from the wizards on the bus wasn’t good enough for them. So the charm between you and Madam Adonna was severed; that quite likely could be what killed you. Although you did remain unconscious yet alive for several more days afterward. Madam Adonna nearly went mad with fury when she found out her charm was broken prematurely.” She solemnly gazed at him.

An odd picture of a crazy woman healer yelling, “CRUCIO!” shot through his mind. Godric, it was HER on the Fright Bus! Staring at Ginny, he realised he couldn’t share this particular thought with her. So he sat and listened instead.

“The Ministry was left with a very serious case on their hands. Three Muggles and a Wizard killed—or nearly killed—in a horrible car crash by means of magic. Naturally, officials did a trace of spells performed in and around the area where you and the Dursleys had been in the car. And they found that Disillusionment, Invisibility, and Hover Charms had all been illegally performed in or around the times and locations where the car in question was assumed to be,” Ginny continued grimly.

“Yes, I know!” exclaimed Harry, “it was the Death Eaters! Before the car hit the ground, I saw them out the front windscreen!”

Ginny gawped at him. “Death Eaters? Are you certain you saw them? Nothing was ever mentioned at trial! This could clear your name!”

She was sounding desperate.

Harry looked at her oddly and said, “Of course I saw them. Three of them, plain as day. Right between when the car lifted off and crashed.

And you keep banging on about convictions and trials,” he went on getting agitated with her once more. “What, precisely, was I accused of in relation to this fatal car crash?”

Ginny looked at him pityingly again. It nearly made him sick.

But what she said next shocked him to the core. She responded in a hollow, dead voice, “Harry, you were tried and convicted on three counts of attempted murder. The Ministry says you wanted to kill the Dursleys.”

At first, Harry didn't know what to say or think or do. It was all so absurd. How could anyone think he'd tried to kill his own relatives? Preposterous! First of all he'd been in the car with them...why would he ever—

But then he recalled all of the important things Ginny had been saying, which, at the time had seemed completely insignificant. So that was why she had been so painstakingly explaining things...asked for a minimum of interruptions but tolerated all of his outbursts anyway—she'd wanted him to understand. Knew he needed to.

Three different Charms performed illegally near the vehicle...which indicated it had to be an underage wizard...Harry had been the only one nearby...but then, what had the Dursleys told the court? Would they ever have agreed to go to the Ministry of Magic? If it meant the oddball among them got a conviction...

Shaking his head, Harry already thought he knew the answer. He turned to Ginny and asked the morbid question.

“And what did my relatives tell the court about me, if anything?” he tried steeling himself for the reply.

“Actually, your aunt and uncle were still unconscious at the time of trial. It was Dudley's statements which were instrumental to the prosecution.”

“Let me guess,” Harry growled darkly. “He told them all how I climbed in the car and used my wand, which was in my shirt—with Hedwig on my lap—to turn us and the car invisible in a green flash of light.”

“Something like that,” Ginny half-confirmed. “He actually said how very angry you were—how you'd yelled and cursed at his father after he'd demanded to know where the green flash came from.”

“How could they believe him?” Harry asked, getting upset again. “Everyone knows how the Dursleys and I never got along, and they hate anything to do with magic. It was particularly difficult to deal with their rubbish being so close to...to Black's death...” blinked Harry painfully.

“That’s the thing,” Ginny responded quickly. “At first, nobody would believe him at all. His claims were too outrageous, especially given your personal background. It was even brought up how you’d saved him last year with your Patronus Charm. But after Madam Adonna had given her deposition and statements, general attitudes changed. It was like Ministry after the Triwizard Tournament, all over again. Proceedings were closed to anyone but necessary personnel and witnesses, and they couldn’t seem to get through deliberations fast enough.”

“What happened then?” asked Harry, perplexed.

“Apparently, new things had come to light. The Tribunal thought they could move you to St. Mungo’s after having severed the Gemini Stasis Charm, but Madam Adonna forbade it, and would not give her reasons for doing so to the court.”

“Oh yes...” recalled Harry again, “she said she’d put us in Muggle hospital anyway, because St. Mungo’s was too dangerous, or something.”

Ginny nodded agreement and continued. “Of course they tried to supercede her recommendation, but the ultimate decision for what happened to you was out of their hands as well. The Dursleys were, logically, unreachable—as was Black—so your Aunt Marge was next in line to decide your fate,” she looked at him and bit her bottom lip.

Harry felt his head spin and stomach drop. Dear Godric...not Aunt Marge...after he’d blown her up in a fit of rage that one summer...she’d probably pulled the plug herself. He faced Ginny with a horrified expression. “What did she do with me?”

“Luckily for all involved, she’d wanted nothing to do with you after listening to Dudley’s poison comments. She signed over medical responsibility of you straightaway, and Dumbledore was standing by with your other associates whilst she did so. They of course, were only too happy to fill that vacancy. And you of course, stayed right where you were,” she assured him.

Closing his eyes, Harry pinched the bridge of his nose under his glasses. He thought it odd that even ghosts could get tension headaches. "So Dumbledore and all the others were there. That's good to know someone I trust was looking after my well-being," he said half-heartedly. This was really getting exhausting, but he knew Ginny had more to tell.

Looking at him for confirmation, Ginny went on. "The Ministry was tipped off by your association with Sirius Black—how he was your godfather and how he'd died defending you recently to the Death Eaters. That fact was independently confirmed through the D.E. trials the Court held before the convicts were sent to Azkaban."

Harry screwed up his face. "And from that, the court got...what?"

"Ministry had a holiday with that one. How consorting with a dangerous, murdering fugitive had brainwashed your way of thinking. And that Sirius Black had fuelled and reversed the rage you felt toward him for betraying your parents, back onto the Dursleys instead," she glanced up at Harry, looking positively nauseated. She held a hand to her stomach and swallowed.

Harry stared at her. This was crazy and unfathomable.

She plunged on. "They also said your altered appearance was irrefutable proof of the fact you were concentrating all thought on Sirius that night, sometime before you passed out," she said, looking even more ill, as if saying these words caused her sickness.

"Yes, that's certainly true—" he began.

"Sirius," repeated Ginny loudly over the top of him, "the man whom you'd watched die in front of your very eyes. Your own godfather. The prosecution said that you were so fraught with guilt over his death, you became homicidally revengeful toward your actual relatives, whom you hated anyway due to his evil influence." She closed her eyes tight shut and finished croakingly, "They'd said how killing the Dursleys was your way of...evening your score with life." Ginny faded into sickened silence and looked down whilst cradling her middle.

Knowing he should probably voice more righteous anger toward the Ministry for their horrible unfounded accusations, Harry stewed silently instead. What good would shouting do anyway? Obviously the time for swaying decisions had passed. The court proceedings Ginny had described were so...typical...of the Ministry's ever-present vendetta they had against him. Upon further reflection, he realised nothing about them truly surprised him anymore. Not after his trial last year.

Besides, Ginny didn't look like she could take much more outbursts at the moment. He watched as she fought with her rebelling insides and lost the battle on the ground opposite them.

"Sorry," she apologised weakly when she was through. "I've...I've just...never been able to bring myself to say that wretched stuff out loud before. It was difficult enough thinking about all the horrible lies they said about you and Sirius..." she paused, looking as if she were fighting it again.

Harry felt for her. Best thing for it was a distraction. "It's quite all right," he replied, rescuing her from explanation. "I've felt the same way for similar reasons—a reaction that never really seems to leave you, I'm afraid. Perhaps it would've done me some good if I'd been able to toss my lunch and be done with it." He tilted his head at her. "Maybe I could've won some more Quidditch matches that way," he quirked a half-smile at her encouragingly.

Ginny tried to acknowledge his cheer-up with a smile, but managed only a grimace instead. "You're taking the latest news of the Ministry rather well," she observed.

"I suppose," Harry contemplated, "all of my surprise circuits concerning them have just been jammed to the 'on' position." He tossed her a rueful look. "Can't feel any less about their track record concerning me if I tried, I'll wager."

Wrinkling her nose, Ginny warned, "Don't be too sure of that."

Harry replied with a shaking head, "Whenever you're ready to tell it, go straight ahead." Squinting, he added, "I think it rather odd they could come to a decision without speaking to me, however."

"That's another weird thing," Ginny agreed, "all of the court proceedings—from charges to sentencing—which obviously didn't matter after all—were finished before you had even...died," finished Ginny quietly.

"What?" Harry's voice rose again, "But how long was I in hospital?"

"A week."

"A week ? That's ridiculous! A case that large would require loads of evidence to back it up, and they hadn't even spoken to the accused—"

"Besides the fact Ministry jumped at their last chance to call you the fraud and not themselves, a critical piece of evidence went missing," Ginny cut in his tirade.

"Critical piece'?" he repeated darkly, "and what would that be?"

"It was the one thing that would've answered all questions; the one thing that would've cleared your name," she said. "Your wand, Harry."

He scowled at Ginny in concentration. Harry knew vaguely what she was referring to, after watching previous spell echoes be recalled from wands before.

"You mean they would've known by my wand? Performing Priori Incantatem? How could they do that when the wand is broken?"

"The wooden part of wands is mostly used as a protective sheath for the magical core inside—like a conductor and a grounder in one," said Ginny, making sure he followed. Harry nodded once.

"The broken part of your wand was luckily not splintered, it just halved in two along a seam, so it could still be used...somewhat. The crucial element was the phoenix feather inside your wand—which was a bit

damaged—and that’s what holds the majority of the wand’s magic as well as the spell memory,” she looked over at him. Rivetted, Harry watched her.

“All they needed to finish conducting the Priori Incantatem was three drops of its owner’s living blood. Applying it to the wooden parts of the wand would’ve reestablished the magical connection. That would’ve been sufficient to draw out the previous spells and exonerate you,” said Ginny.

“That explains why I couldn’t get it to work until after I spat on it,” Harry spoke up.

“You what?” responded Ginny curiously.

He lifted an eyebrow. “The first time I tried the wand, it was covered in dried blood, but it still wouldn’t work. So for reasons I still can’t explain, I slimed the thing with my...saliva,” he shrugged unapologetically.

She looked askance at him. “Well, as long as it worked, I suppose,” answered Ginny simply.

Shaking his head, Harry said in a resigned voice, “So the wand goes missing and the gavel went bang. Typical.”

“Yes, but you said the thing about the Death Eaters,” she replied excitedly, “and the case should be reopened...” Ginny trailed off.

“To what end?” he said, and looked down. “It’s obvious everybody needs to get on with their lives. No use wasting time and energy defending somebody who’s already dead,” said Harry quietly, and closed his eyes.

“Now you listen to me,” Ginny said sternly. “There is not one single person on the other side of this headstone—” she jabbed a finger at the slab of granite—“who wouldn’t go to the ends of this earth to prove your innocence, even if it means posthumously. We know you died after saving the Dursleys, not trying to murder them. The Ministry should pay for the slanderous propaganda and lies they’ve

spread about you and your godfather. Sirius Black and Harry James Potter are innocent!" she cried and thrust her arm into the air.

Harry was floored and heartened by Ginny's passionate declaration. She obviously meant every word she said. It also reminded him of something else he'd heard her say earlier...

"When I first saw you, you said that all of you—even Percy—knew of my innocence," he paused waiting for her confirmation, "but what did you mean by the 'dying with a...burden of guilt' and 'being the one to tell me' comments?" he asked uncertainly.

At this, all the sparkle in Ginny's eyes fizzled out and she stared at the ground. "Surely you know the answer to that, Harry?" she asked in a saddened whisper.

"No."

"Nick told me that he'd explained to you..."

"You converse with Nick?" Harry asked, nonplussed.

"He came and found me at the feast, and said he was worried about you because you demanded to know about Sirius," she answered and held a hand up to silence Harry. "And he knew you wouldn't want the teachers involved, or anybody else who was too close—like Ron and Hermione," added Ginny helpfully.

Harry just blinked at her. Nick was worried about him? So he told Ginny?

"Nick told me that he'd explained to you the reason many ghosts exist in the first place. That something about their living existence prevented them from allowing themselves to die." She looked at him solemnly.

"The reason or reasons enough had to be so huge—and make them so upset, scared, or unhappy—as to interrupt their whole way of thinking and living even before they died, however." She reached out

a hand as if to touch him, but her hand halted midair. Comprehension began filling Harry's mind.

"Think, Harry," she encouraged gently, "why would you be a ghost in the first place? What is it, in your life, that could've made you so unhappy that you couldn't possibly allow yourself to go on, even after death?"

Staring at her in shock, Harry took a step back. Then another. And another; finally answering Ginny in an awed whisper.

"Sirius."

"Yes Harry. Sirius. You were even wearing a partial visage of him when they found you, remember? Your guilt and blaming yourself over his death has evidently prevented you from passing on...that's why I wanted to tell you...that we knew, that I understood why you felt how you did. Also not to blame yourself for the Dursleys. We didn't know how much you'd remember from the accident, if you ever woke up. Obviously, I never got the chance to tell you..." she bit her bottom lip hard and closed her eyes, "and nobody regretted not telling you more than me."

Harry shook his head and answered, "But...how...how could you know? I never told anyone. How could you know I was feeling...that much...that badly...for Black, Ginny?"

"How could I know?" she echoed. "Because it was the same thing I had felt when we looked at each other in the Chamber of Secrets and knew you were going to die. Shame at having been saved, only to watch my rescuer dying as a result of my foolish action. The worst kind of feeling—survivor guilt, Harry. I know how you'd feel, because I've felt it myself, she finished deliberately.

Ginny had done it again. She'd pointed out to him the mystery behind not only why he felt so terrible for Sirius, but something Harry hadn't even begun to think on. Why he was a ghost to begin with...guilt was a very powerful thing, evidently...

Folding her arms and looking away, Ginny allowed Harry a few moments of contemplation on his existence. But he couldn't really think on it any more. Instead, he found his eyes had come to rest on the bright gift box in Ginny's lap.

"Could...could I...?" as Harry reached for the box, Ginny placed it in his trembling hands.

Or she would have; the colourful object merely passed straight through him. Why can't I hold the box now? Ginny had an answer for that too.

"Apparently, you haven't quite got the hang of 'spectral manipulation' yet," she supplied knowingly.

Harry lashed out at her. "Has anyone told you that at times you appear to be channelling Hermione Granger?" he said crossly. He hadn't meant to; his anger was for something else entirely—like not being able to hold the box, for starters. But it had just so happened Ginny got caught in the crossfire.

Folding her arms, she intoned quietly, "And has anyone ever told you to read the library books or revise your textbooks? The term 'spectral manipulation' is explained first year. Mostly the subject is revised to keep the youngest students from getting scared out of their wits about the house ghosts—Peeves, in particular—who is a master of it. They even touch on it in 'Hogwarts, A History.'"

"Oh." Daunted, Harry again realised in a difficult way how being dead was different. It was also intensely strange to think that he was in any way similar to beings like Peeves, Nearly Headless Nick, or... he shuddered...the Bloody Baron.

He narrowed his eyes and contemplated what Ginny said about reading more books. Granted he should've studied a bit more in life. Being dead, he could undoubtedly do something to remedy his neglectful ignorance, however. He had nothing but time now. Maybe he could even haunt the Hogwarts library, scaring the living daylights out of Mr. Filch and his foul feline, Mrs. Norris. Oh yes, Ginny was waiting.

“Sorry, but what is ‘spectral manipulation’?” Harry ventured repentantly.

“It is the ability of a spiritual entity to interact physically with the people and objects around them,” she answered. “And it evidently requires much practise and thought; not all ghosts have equal talent for it. Studies indicate ability tends to be related to how powerful a person’s mind was while they were still living, as well.”

Then her eyes sparkled. “The text also told us how very moody souls can be, and how to deal with them—if at all. In fact, they used Moaning Myrtle as a prime example.”

Moaning Myrtle and Howling Harry, chanted a maniacal little voice inside his head, Hogwarts Hopelessly Hapless Pathetic Poltergeist Pair! A loo and a library? Harry answered the voice back. Myrtle would be beside herself with glee if he showed up in present form. Harry shook himself forcefully and determined to try and focus on what he’d been doing. It wasn’t easy.

“Anything in your reading about a ghost’s lack of concentration?” he asked her, “or inability to think straight?”

“Most certainly,” replied Ginny and furrowed her brow. “In fact, it says that’s what can most often cause moody behaviour of spirits in the first place. Thoughts for individuals become more and more sporadic after they’ve died. Their experiences—living and dead—eventually jumble together and it can become near-impossible to sort out.” She leaned forward a bit and continued.

“Speculation has it the reason for this is there is nowhere solid for their thoughts to be organised or contained. No way for the spirit in question to hold in all those thoughts—like they did in body. Only the strongest and most stubborn of souls can survive for any appreciable amount of time in this state. So cheers for you, Harry,” she finished without a trace of sarcasm.

“You got all of that information from textbooks?” he demanded of her.

“Most certainly not,” she answered in a huff. “A lot of it I got from Divination lessons at school—the séance chapters were loads of help.”

“Don’t tell me all of that rubbish Trelawney says is true!” he shouted in a surprised voice.

“That sounds extremely narrow-minded, coming from a ghost such as yourself,” Ginny admonished as her eyebrow rose. “Besides, the correct principles of the class are all there, it’s only the method of delivery which is complete bunk.” She lifted the other eyebrow. “And apparently I’m quite adept at some parts of Divination. I can quite often stump the teacher, much to her chagrin.” She grinned broadly.

Shaking his head, Harry contemplated the fact that anything about his education as an afterlife denizen would have anything to do with Sybill Trelawney. Weird, weird, weird.

Resigning himself, Harry turned to Ginny again and asked, “Did Trelawney teach you anything about how...ghosts can...move things around?” he mumbled hopefully.

“Sort of,” she added, “it told of the basic theory...but not much more. Basically, you just have to...visualise yourself in mind doing what you want to in spirit. You have to want it to happen.” She gestured him to stand up with her as she rose.

Holding out the arm containing the box she said, “Now, start with something simpler than picking the box up. Picture yourself removing the lid. Just hit the corner, and it’ll fly off—I’ll hold onto the bottom half tightly so it won’t go with it. Give it a go,” she nodded encouragingly, hands tightening on her half of the box.

Harry closed his eyes to collect his thoughts. I have to want it to happen, he chanted, want it to happen...want...it...to...happen.... wantit..tohappen...wantittohappen....

He felt his arm fly out and rush passed the ribbons across the top of the box. Opening his eyes, he looked at Ginny’s face.

“No go,” she said apologetically. “Try it again—only watch your aim this time.”

Keeping his eyes open, Harry chanted to himself again, Want...it... to... happen...want...itto...happen...wantitto...happen... wantittohappen...wantittohappen...

His fingertips grazed one end of the box that time. It was a bit less daunting to try again now. Ginny merely nodded to show readiness for him to try once more.

Staring in almost mad concentration at the top of the box, he focussed yet again, and started his internal mantra, Want...it... to... happen....want...itto...happen...wantitto...happen... wantittohappen...

wantittohappen...at the last second, he had a flash of Sirius pop into his mind.

Reaching out his arm again, Harry watched as his hand squarely caught the edge of the bright box and the lid flew off of it. Hedwig alighted in indignation, apparently having almost been struck by the flying lid.

“Sorry, Hedwig!” Harry called exultantly, “I forgot you were there!”

He and Ginny grinned hugely at each other. “I knew you could do it!” she shouted happily. “What did you do different that last time though?” she asked.

“I suppose I just...thought of something that...helped me focus better,” he answered breathlessly and grinned again. He held a fist to the air and let out a whoop.

“Now, I assume you wanted a look at these,” reminded Ginny, stepping forward to him. She pulled her wand from her robes.

“Since it’s dark—LUMOS!—here’s a bit of light,” she held the wand out for him as they looked into the box together.

He saw his name again, atop the first cert sheet, and Ginny pulled it away to reveal subsequent papers underneath it for him. At last they came to the signature page. This was the one Harry truly wanted to hold in his hands; Ginny could tell by looking in his face. Setting the box on the ground, she left the extra papers in it and removed the signed one and held it out to him delicately.

“Close your eyes this time, Harry.”

He obediently did as she said.

“Imagine the texture of the parchment, the way its rough surface slides over your skin, the heavier weight of it in your hands...”

As she spoke, he saw the paper in his mind’s eye, and could picture himself holding on to it. Ginny’s description was so realistic, it felt as if the page was right in his hands.

“Harry, open your eyes,” said Ginny in a barely contained whisper.

Slowly opening his eyes, Harry looked down. The parchment was in his hands! Ginny had slipped the paper through his fingers, and he hadn’t noticed. But he’d done it! The feelings of accomplishment he now felt rivalled his winning the Quidditch Cup.

Ginny looked up and beamed at him. She knew how important this was, and let him revel in the moment. Suddenly he realised he couldn’t read the paper very well, as Ginny’s wandlight was shining through the back of it.

Concentrating hard, Harry dropped a supporting hand from the parchment and held his breath. He began slowly reaching into the front of his robes for his wand. It was as if he were balancing a delicate glass globe in his hand instead of holding onto a simple piece of parchment. The wand was at last unsheathed; he held it up carefully and said, “LUMOS!” The wand sparked to life in an eerie greenish glow.

Studying Harry's black wand, Ginny's eyes grew huge with comprehension. And fear. "Is...that...what...I...thinkitis?" she finished in a rush. "I mean, how can you hold a wand?"

Harry attempted a shrug. "I honestly couldn't tell you. It's just a wand my father gave me for my...Death-day party," he ended, not wanting to explain himself further.

"Oh, all right," Ginny answered, appearing none-too-assured. "Erm, there's another paper in the box you haven't seen," she went on unsteadily. "But it's sort of...sort of morbid." She was flicking glances at him out of the corner of her eye now.

"Very well," said Harry, wanting to change the subject, "let's see it."

Walking over to the box, Ginny rifled through the papers and came away with a small half-sheet, which had a seal near the bottom. She walked over and held it out saying, "It's your death certificate, actually."

"Oh," Harry answered dully. Any subject but that one.

Ginny came and stood by him, and held out the smaller piece of parchment for his inspection. It was odd seeing his name on an adoption cert and death cert side by side. Very odd. In spite of himself, he swished his wand over it to get a better look. Something very strange happened as he did. Spider-web thin outlines flashed across both sheets of paper; it flickered so briefly he wasn't even sure he'd seen it.

"Did you see that?" Ginny and Harry both turned to each other and asked simultaneously.

"Maybe it's because of the papers' proximity together," offered Ginny.

Harry glanced at her sharply. "Why, has this happened before?" he asked, knowing the answer would be no. Ginny only shook her head.

“My guess would be it’s the two different kinds of light,” he ventured, and flicked his wand again. “LUMOS MAXIMA!” His wand burned brighter emerald.

This time, the gossamer lines on the two papers no longer flickered—they stayed lit under the bright green light of Harry’s wand.

Next to the wizard’s signatures were tiny silvery icons; one to represent each magical person’s signature. This meant Petunia’s and Vernon’s had no icons. One of the witnesses’ names had a tiny glittering cat next to it. The other one had a small crown, and Sirius’s name of course had a paw print by it. Harry noticed his icon was very special; it was the only one that moved. He watched as it transformed from a letter “m”, to an “h”, then to “j”, and finally to “p”, and back to “m” again to restart the process.

“Metamorphmagus Harry James Potter,” murmured Ginny wonderingly, just as entranced as he was by his icon.

“I’d wager this is some sort of security measure,” said Harry softly, still staring at the small pretty pictures, “to prove the authenticity of the documents. To show that they’re genuine and not faked.”

“Yes, it would seem so,” agreed Ginny, “but look what happened to the death cert.”

Instead of seeing his name and the time and date of death, all of those lines were completely blank. Curious. Harry tried something. “Nox.” His wand went out, the icons disappeared, and the missing writing was back on the death certificate.

Lighting his wand again, he peered studiously at the smaller piece of paper. Something appeared to be flashing through from the other side. Evidently, Ginny noticed it too and she flipped the parchment over.

In the left-hand corner of the back, was a small crown-shaped icon blinking on and off ever so delicately.

He and Ginny looked at one another intently.

“Could you...?” he asked, and held the adoption cert out to Ginny. She swapped papers with him carefully and put the larger one back in the box and quickly walked back over.

“Any ideas?” she asked curiously, looking at Harry who was staring at the flashing little crown.

“One,” he answered, “but I’m not sure if I can do the spell—I’ve only seen it done once.”

Tapping his wand tip to the parchment surface, he canted, “Reveal your secret.”

Ginny gasped in surprise as flowing black ink spidered over the paper. When it stopped, five small pictures were revealed across the middle of the page. They were immediately recognisable.

“The Four Marauders signs!” Harry exclaimed. “Mssrs. Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs!”

“And there’s you,” Ginny shouted, pointing to the fifth picture, “Mssr. M.M.M.!”

Shaking and breathing hard now, Harry glanced at Ginny and said, “Here goes nothing.” Placing his wand to his icon, he chanted, “I do solemnly swear that I am up to no good.”

Immediately the five icons vanished, to be replaced by silvery threads of glittering calligraphy. The words were shimmering as dew on a spider web and looked almost alive.

Harry and Ginny read them aloud together:

“I must not tell lies,” a young wizard once wrote;
Act easy, none told in this complex note.
Midst horrors now experienced, through deeds done or said
The one thing to know is that wizard’s not dead—

“What is this, some sort of cruel joke?” demanded Harry. “Somebody who wanted to mess with my friend’s minds? How can I not be dead?”

Dear Readers,

I would like to apologise for this chapter being so long in coming. You see, I agonised over the poem...I had to make sure it matched what I needed the audience/characters to understand, all without revealing too much. The vocabulary was a bugger, too. I had to make sure certain leading letters would fit in with the verses. This is also an extremely crucial segment for this particular story.

Certain elements in this chapter are of course, somewhat recognisable from other things you've read or seen in movies/literary genre. That can't be helped. But I found it an immense challenge to give the spiritual summoning actions a completely different twist. I desired for it to feel REAL, not make-believe or forced; so that you could see it happening in your minds. To inspire your want to be there, as Harry or one of his friends, in that graveyard fighting an evilly-influenced future. Hopefully it won't feel or read like something fake, hokey, or cheesy. Sincerely, Rae C.

BREKBBREKBBREKBBREKBBREKBBREKBBREKBBREKBBREK
BREKBBREK

Ginny's eyes were full of urgency, and she was almost pleading. "This arrived days after your death, Harry—remember that! That's why I was so shocked you knew of the box's existence and contents." She gulped hard. "Someone wanted you to have it...they knew you needed to know! Keep reading!"

Days after? Harry thought wildly. Just how long have I been dead? Then, Does it really matter? He didn't think so. All that mattered now was...to keep reading...?

"How is that so?" I know you'll want to ask,
Ergo simplistic answers; I'll take you to task.
Healthy evil's afoot so all must be revealed
Albeit cloak and dagger—using words as our shield.

Live must burn desire to change what he sees;
Fight when things are wrong—not his destiny.
By changes, I mean, at the very least—
Lies—question the fact he's really deceased?

Harry stopped reading again and stared at the paper, not really seeing the words. Considering the things he'd experienced as of late, this poem was a bit rich. After a minute, Ginny snatched the paper from him in irritation. She continued:

On rests the assistance to reverse his mad end;
Odds can't be undone without true living friends.
Duo's already learnt this—one near-death, one life;
Present clues remained hidden till you shared your light.

Reigns now is one future—though both skewed and altered;
Inception near-whole, it's no wonder you've faltered.
Now the black-riddled soul who holds right events fast
Conceals wizard's true fate. Boy who lives in the past!

Eyes on this box—find our wizard host's mirror.
Look in—call his name—bring reality clearer.
If things that are seen leave you mystified
Remember to cipher the wrapper inside.

Make haste on your quest, be quick then—good show.
Opportunities taken; victory you'll know.
If you don't quickly switch back right from wrong,
Our wizard we know shall fail to go on.

Be watchful, be wary; in his present state
Separate spirit and body deteriorates
His will to live on; death's siren call zeal.
He needs you—his friends—to keep straight, what is real.

Don't let him give in, postpone the surrender
Lest Dark One's minions will make him their member.
First point out what's wrong, when he knows you're sure
Could be the one thing to help him endure.

With Moonrise strikes his toll, yours too—all be brave
And stand tall together with him by his "grave"
Next Summon more friends, as much as you can—
Door Keys for his return you'll each hold in your hand.

Signed, A Helpful Friend

Finishing, Ginny looked up at him, eyes overflowing with importance.

“This is it,” she said positively, “Harry, don’t you see? You’re not really dead! Vold—it’s he who’s changing what the true events are! It can be changed back...we can do this!”

She bustled about, gathering the death cert and box halves, continuing, “And we don’t have much time, according to this. We need to figure things out straight away—moonrise is soon—whatever they may be.”

Just standing there, Harry folded his arms and called to her, “What’s the rush? That poem’s probably all rubbish anyway. No need to stress yourself out over nothing,” he said dismissively.

“Nothing?” Ginny repeated in a disgusted voice. “Something falls into your lap, telling you not only your death is a mistake, but how you can reverse the process?” she stopped, as if a terrible thought had just struck her.

She gazed at Harry and in a concerned tone said, “Harry, the poem is real. There are things mentioned in it that could never be possible otherwise. It even speaks of why you’re having this uncharacteristic reaction to the news. You’ve been out of body so long; you’re not even capable of recognising it on your own,” she pressed her lips to a thin line and folded her arms, studying him.

Something stirred inside Harry as she spoke. Looking down at her, he said, “...yeah...I-I think you’re right—you have to be right.” Holding a hand to his forehead, he gulped in fearful realisation. “I just...I can’t explain it. Right now, I’m feeling so—so not like usual—I’m just...tired...” his eyes widened and he stared at her, “...dead tired,” he finished in a frightened whisper.

Ginny sucked in a breath through her teeth. “Well of course you are, Harry. If the last thing you remember from your life is passing out on the Knight Bus, that could mean you’ve been in ghost form for nearly

two weeks now. That would exhaust anyone, I'd imagine," she reached out automatically to touch him, and awkwardly let her arm drop.

Then her gaze grew hard; determined. "What you need to do is fight it, Harry. Just like the poem says. You need the personal belief you're not dead—you have that at the moment now—the desire to fight against all the things you know are wrong, and friends to help point out the difference," she turned as if to march passed the headstone, "which is why I'm going to get us some more help—right now."

Abruptly stopping, Ginny looked up at the thing now blocking her would-be exit.

She had almost run straight into Neville Longbottom. He looked down at her with a gaze of deep concern and said in his sweet tenor, "Ginny, are you...are you all right? We heard your crying and then...not. Are you talking to someone?" he inquired softly, and looked around.

As he did, Harry noticed other friends of his filing passed the headstone around them. Harry and Ginny suddenly found themselves surrounded by Seamus Finnigan, Justin Finch-Fletchley, Luna Lovegood, Dean Thomas, Susan Bones, Michael Corner, along with Longbottom. Each of these former classmates had been members of the D.A. And all of them wore similar expressions to Neville's; even Luna's usual dreaminess was heavily subdued.

Attempting to step around Neville, Ginny hastily answered, "No, everything isn't all right, but it can be. I need to get some more people—"

"But there's nobody else here," Susan spoke up, surprisingly timid.

"What?" Ginny asked, stopping.

"Yes," added Seamus, "everyone pretty much cleared off. "Nobody wanted to be around for the...casket lowering," he finished barely audibly.

Eyes widening, Harry contemplated this. The...the casket? He hadn't even noticed the thing on the other side of the headstone whilst reading the epitaph to himself. Apparently, Harry had stumbled upon his own funeral and hadn't realised his body lay before him in state. How undeniably...creepy.

Ginny's eyes narrowed and she said impatiently. "What of my family?"

Stepping forward, Justin said, "Your twin brothers could barely hold it together through the end. They're so convinced the Ministry plotted Harry's death, they can't decide whom to kill first—Fudge or Percy." "Your father went with Bill and Charlie to the twins' pad in Diagon Alley," Michael's shoulders tensed, "to hopefully cool them down and convince them of the futility of such an action," he added behind Justin. "We stayed here for you, he emphasized, "because we knew you'd want to be alone for a bit."

Stunned, the pair of Ginny and Harry just stood there. Never before had Harry realised that grief could affect those he knew in so many ways. Apparently, great anger had driven Fred and George's thirst for vengeance. Harry knew that feeling very well.

"And Mum?" demanded Ginny, shaking off her surprise, "Ron? Other adults?"

"Everyone witnessed Hermione's near-collapse," Dean said, in a sad tone. "She was so upset, she couldn't stand the thought they were going to put her best friend into the...the cold ground," he faded off as everyone pressed their eyes shut in sympathy, and Harry found himself feeling terrible for poor Hermione.

"Ron and Mrs. Weasley went with her to the Leaky Cauldron to hopefully sort it out. Ron is also the only one Hermione will speak to," finished Justin, looking down. Everyone stood together in pained silence.

Then Neville began in a stronger tone, "And did you remember the Hogwarts staff is setting up for the wandlighting ceremony tomorrow

night? Loads of people have been showing up all week at school—to pay their last respects for Harry.”

Ginny tilted her head and studied Neville.

Wandlighting ceremony? thought Harry incredibly. For plain old me?

Those kinds of things were for really important people, like Wizengamot members and such. Harry, Hermione, and the younger Weasleys had sometimes heard the Order talking about similar things during their stays at Grimmauld Place.

“But I thought our ceremony was intended as a memorial service to Harry’s fellow students and friends,” said Ginny, perplexed.

Something flashed in Neville’s eyes and he continued in an even stronger voice, “Professor Dumbledore let slip to the press of our planning. At first, the rest of us were all upset—we wanted to keep it private, after all—but too many people wanted to be involved the more they heard about it.” He took a deep breath and said, “Apparently, thousands of witches and wizards wanted to take active part in the service, to show their unflagging support for Harry. How they think what the Ministry has done to him is unjustifiable in the worst possible way.”

Dean took his turn to step in. “And evidently, we’re not the only ones convinced of Harry’s innocence.” He smiled tightly. “The whole world seems to have got wind of this, and wants to show their belief of Harry’s true intentions as well. A dozen or so Wizarding schools the world over are hosting simultaneous services tomorrow night. It’s turned into a virtual protest of Ministry’s catalogue of offensive actions against Harry—the boy wizard who never once lied to us,” he finished in a righteous sounding voice.

Thunderstruck by all he had just heard, Harry simply stared fixedly at his friends. So many magic folk...whom I’ve never heard of or met...are showing their unfailing support of...me. But why? Suddenly the answer came to him. Trust. They trust me. Ministry’s lied to everyone for years about Voldemort...and who knows what else...but they trust me, an ordinary teenage wizard, just because I always told the truth when I was alive. Realisation dawned on Harry as he

grasped the implications. His head reeled with the impossibility of it all. This was near unthinkable. Evidently the majority of the magic world puts my words above those of their own minister.

Harry looked at his friends as if for vindication that his thoughts had been wrong; but as he did, he became aware of a mighty change that had wrought the visage of each of them. The talk of Harry's innocence and his upcoming ceremony seemed to have brought them all closer together, somehow. Gone were the tears and sad faces; only shared knowledge and determination remained in their eyes. He had never witnessed such a companionable certainty amongst his friends before. Even Ginny found herself caught up in it and couldn't speak.

Closing his eyes, Harry drew strength from their surrounding goodwill; so strong was the positive energy, one couldn't help but want to be a part. He also felt he was going to need it. An indescribably familial sensation started in his chest and radiated throughout the rest of his body, transforming the doubt in his mind to pure certainty. But he wasn't a stranger to these feelings, however. Harry realised the last time he had even remotely felt this way had been when Sirius was alive.

Hedwig alighted on his shoulder, and Harry reached up automatically to stroke her. But as he opened his eyes, he realised he was looking right into Luna Lovegood's face. Her eyes were hugely round and luminous; she was staring straight at him.

She raised a hand and pointed, "That's who you were talking to Ginny, isn't it," she said with clear unfeigned assurity. "He's here—watching us now—Harry came to you."

Ginny whirled around and faced Luna and Harry; he was still staring at Luna's face, as if looking away would somehow make him disappear again. All of his friends in turn came to gaze intently at the spot where Luna was pointing—where Harry now stood.

In turn, all of them studied the centre of the circle. Their eyes widened together; Harry held his breath. How would they all react?

"Yes," Ginny spoke up fervently, "Harry came to me. And now our bond of friendship is helping each of you to see him, too. Just there," she said, pointing to him as well.

Rather than uncertainty, disbelief, or fear, Harry saw looks of almost relief come over their faces. A few were still squinting, though.

"I can see him," said Susan clearly, "but...but he's still...I can only see his outline."

"Yeah, me too," Neville spoke up, "he's kind of...hazy...I can't see him very well."

The others nodded and Ginny stepped forward, gesturing toward him. "That's because Harry needs us, needs help. He needs our feelings of friendship to help him be seen."

"And what do we need to do?" asked Dean earnestly, whilst everybody else nodded again.

Ginny answered, "I'm not entirely certain, but it was definitely the talking about the wandlighting ceremony which brought it about." She pursed her lips. "It's the similar concept...does everyone remember the...the thing we tried together week before school got out?" she said, darting quick glances toward Harry.

"Y'mean when we tried to contact Sirius Black's spirit?" piped up Seamus helpfully.

Ginny cringed. "Yes. That's what I mean," she answered through gritted teeth, now studiously avoiding Harry's gaze.

"You...you all tried to contact Sirius before school got out?" Harry questioned, nonplussed.

Swallowing, Ginny replied quietly, "We saw you so sad after your ordeal in the Department of Mysteries, and all felt so helpless." She turned and looked him directly in the eye. "Each of us figured it was the least we could do, to try and talk to your godfather...somehow let him know you needed to see him, talk to him again."

Harry's mouth opened in surprise. "And all of you decided to do this—do this, just for me?"

Luna spoke up again. "Of course we did, Harry. We tried reaching your godfather every night. But the last time Nearly Headless Nick came upon us to kindly explain the futility of our efforts. How Sirius wasn't a ghost and we'd never be able to contact him. He even told Ginny at the feast how you desperately questioned him about your godfather—so he could hopefully get someone living to talk to you about it. But you weren't much up to listening to people then, quite understandably."

Overcome by this revelation, Harry stuttered, "I...I—I don't know what to say." He'd never known his friends cared about how he was doing so much. "But...thank you," he said, as a feeling of eternal gratefulness swelled inside him.

"Hey, Harry's outline's getting sharper!" shouted Seamus to the others.

Susan chimed in, "Yes, and I can almost hear him speaking now, too."

"Everybody do like we did before," called Ginny to them all loudly, "wands out, tip to tip."

As everybody else reached into his or her robes, Michael said, "But won't we get in trouble for doing magic outside of school?"

Groans met this comment and Dean said, "How can you even think about expulsion at a time like this?" whilst everyone glared Michael down.

As he humbly retrieved his wand, Ginny said, "All right everybody. Think of Harry at his best; think of how we knew him when he was alive. Anything will work—physical attributes, how you remember him walking to class, facial expressions, even him kicking the tar out of Malfoy in duelling club and Quidditch." They all shared a laugh and large grins at this; Harry found himself joining in.

Ginny now stepped to the outside of the circle and said, “Just focus on your one best thing—make the circle smaller—and we’ll chant his name together.” She still clutched the box in the arm opposite her wand hand.

Harry watched as all eight of them moved closer and reached out their wands to touch the tips together over his head, creating an umbrella effect.

“I’ll start first, and everyone go counterclockwise,” added Ginny.

Wondering what was going to happen next, Harry watched as his friends closed their eyes, one by one, concentrating.

“Harry,” said Ginny in sudden clarity. He started.

“James,” continued Neville in the same voice.

“Potter,” sustained Susan.

“Harry.” It was Justin.

“James.” Michael now.

“Potter,” said Luna dreamily.

“Harry,” called Dean surely.

“James,” Seamus intoned.

“Potter,” sang Ginny, completing the first round.

But it didn’t stop there. Harry listened, ensorcelled, as his friends continued to chant his name, faster and faster. Harry James Potter...Harry James Potter...Harry James Potter...

Closing his eyes, he felt a rushing sound fill his ears and positive thought fill his mind. It was almost as if he were tapping into their

minds somehow...able to see himself exactly as they had seen him.
Harry James Potter...Harry James Potter...Harry James Potter...

Since his eyes were closed, he failed to see how the wand tips generated a soft glow that grew to encompass he and his group of friends.

Harry James Potter...Harry James Potter...Harry James Potter...

“Harry,” Ginny softly called to him, eyes still closed, “a little help. Remember, you have to want to be seen, luv.” It was odd; the chant seemed to have continued, even though Ginny had broken it to speak to him.

Harry James Potter...Harry James Potter...Harry James Potter...

He couldn’t remember having concentrated so intently. Harry was picturing himself in solid form, so his friends could see him. Fringe brushing his forehead, clothes resting against his skin, shoes heavy on his feet, glasses perched on his nose...anything to bring back the memories of...being alive.

Suddenly, a jolt shot through his chest. It felt to him almost as if he had been hit with a Tickling Charm, but much more...concentrated. He gasped and opened his eyes.

Everybody was looking at him and smiling. “Welcome back, Harry,” they all said, and slapped each other on the back in their job well done.

“Thank you,” he said, still a little breathless. “Thanks all of you,” he went on, returning their smiles. They beamed at him.

Ginny stepped forward again, all business. “Now that you can finally all believe me,” they looked at each other guiltily—except for Luna, “Harry and I have found out clues that make this wandlighting ceremony completely moot. Contained in this box—” she held it high “—is a way for us to bring Harry back, because it explains how his death is a deceptive mistake in the first place.”

They all stared at her keenly. “But the trick is, we need all the help we can get, all the adults are gone, and the deadline for reversing Harry’s demise is moonrise—tonight,” she finished ominously.

Dean stepped forward with an air of indignation. “Well, woman, why didn’t you tell us this in the first place?”

Harry could see Ginny wilting at Dean’s harsh tone.

“Yes,” added Neville, just as mightily, “if Harry needs our help, all you have to do is say the word!”

They all nodded and murmured in various signs of agreement. Ginny was heartened by their reaction; she turned to Harry who smiled at her encouragingly. She grinned back at him in return.

Each lighting their wands once more, the two of them showed the paper and the poem to everybody, and explained the situation of how they found the clues. Save the Marauders and Order of the Phoenix, of course.

First, they pondered the mirror-in-the-box clue. After removing all the documents, it appeared nothing was left but an ordinary box. The group was starting to feel stumped before they even started.

Then Dean suggested offhandedly, “Has anyone tried ‘open sesame’?”

Everybody glared at him silently with looks ranging from open disbelief to outright disgust.

“What?” he asked, now slightly defensive. “It’s what my little brother says when he’s trying to copy me doing magic,” he shrugged. “Sometimes you gotta call a Squib a ‘Squib’.”

Shaking her head and sighing in staccato, Ginny replied, “All right, chums—” nodding at Seamus and Justin, who were each holding a box half— “give it a go.”

All of them stood back to give the two boys a bit more room.

“Open sesame!” Seamus and Justin cried together, aiming their wands.

Seamus peered into his half and shouted, “Blimey, look at this! It worked, Dean!”

Everyone took turns looking at Seamus’s box half and saw that a tiny brass knob had appeared on the inside.

Looking up at everyone and smiling, Luna reached in and drew the knob upwards; it worked as a sliding jewelry box. And underneath it was Harry's small mirror from Sirius.

Ginny and Harry looked at each other and she mumbled guiltily, "I guess we're lucky we didn't have you practise your 'spectral manipulation' on that half—that's the bottom of the box," she gave him a wide-eyed look which he returned. Woah, almost undone by our own negligence, he thought in disbelief, if that mirror got broken...

Handing the documents in her hands to Susan, Ginny retrieved the mirror. Everyone watched her, murmuring excitedly.

Turning to Harry, Ginny said, "This is yours, then. What does it do?"

"It was a gift from Sirius," Harry replied, stepping forward, "and it allows the possessor to speak to anyone they wish—just look in and call out their name—provided both persons are living, of course," he added quietly.

He remembered how he tried to reach Sirius with that mirror. Harry also noticed the surface now reflected nothing back to him but Ginny's face.

She glanced at him in a worried fashion. "But the poem says to call your name into it," she reminded.

"Yes, and I don't know how it could possibly work—" he started to reply.

Then Susan joined in, "Well, if you think about it, the poem indicates he's dead, near-death, and alive—all at the same time."

They all watched her, captivated. Susan excitedly went on, "It's referring to all three tenses. Past—Harry's alive; present—only near-death, and future—certain death," she finished matter-of-factly, looking a bit self-conscious.

Composing himself as the others contemplated Susan, Harry lifted his eyebrows at her and said, "More tutelage from your 'auntie', I presume?" he asked, smiling.

She grinned, blushed, and nodded to him at the same time.

"So, you think it'll work?" piped up Neville, who had been quiet for quite a long while.

"Only one way to find out," Ginny replied, peering into the mirror again.

"Harry Potter," her voice rang out.

The surface of the small looking glass began to boil and get cloudy, as a hot spring, but nothing clear appeared.

Glancing at the others nervously, Ginny repositioned her feet and called louder, "Harry James Potter!"

The nine of them watched as the small square divided its surface equally into four smaller squares. In the lower left corner appeared a picture of Harry in evergreen dress robes, reclining, eyes closed. It appeared like he was looking at his wake. There was no movement.

"That must be the future," Luna said, and everyone nodded in sober agreement.

In the upper left square was revealed a picture of how Harry looked now: flowing velvet robes, ghost white visage, with a long black queue down his back. The image was blinking hopefully up at them all.

"And that must be him in the present," said Michael, and they agreed again.

Next, the top right square solidified itself into the most disturbing image yet. It was Harry again; only he was in a Muggle hospital bed, utterly still except for the steady rise and fall of his chest. What was most alarming were all the machines this mirror-image appeared to

have that were hooked up and monitoring him. Keeping him alive, if barely.

Everyone had become completely silent and still again. They tried unsuccessfully, to ignore the present Harry's sigh of despair.

"So that's the past," he said in despondence, "where I'm supposedly alive?" He shrank back. "That hardly looks like a life to me." He knew everybody else would be hard-pressed to disagree. The third image of Harry had skin that was so pale, it was almost translucent and rivalled the colour of the starch-white bedsheets behind him.

They all began to exchange looks with one another at Harry's words. But Ginny was not to be deterred. "Harry, look. I know that it looks bad—and believe me—what put you there killed you once, but may the Death Eaters take me away if I let you go off again. Just know that we're here for you now—" she looked around and included them all in with a sweeping gesture and they nodded, "—and we'll be there for you again, in the past. Of all the things we're changing tonight, that will never be one of them, okay?"

"After all," Neville spoke up, "we already know what it's like to not have you around." He looked down and self-consciously kicked a toe against the ground, and murmured, "And I, for one, would rather deal with any kind of a living Harry than not."

"Yeah," added Seamus, coming up behind Neville and slapping a hand on his back, "I mean, how can we have the D.A. without a teacher?" He half-smiled around at them all. "I can honestly say that you've taught me near everything I know on that subject, mate," he finished, and grinned at Harry.

Michael now stepped in and said, "Not to mention Gryffindor's Quidditch team would be more than abysmal without you. Alicia and the twins went, and now Harry.... They just may as well hand the Snitch over and forfeit every match."

They all give a nervous, yet relieved twitter of laughter as Harry smiled a bit and began to feel assured by his friends' words of comfort again. The loyalty and camaraderie they were showing him,

and each other, was nothing short of astounding. Not that Harry had ever thought them incapable of it...he'd just...never thought they'd be doing this for him. What was better was he found himself trusting them implicitly. Not only did they mean everything they were saying, but they were all willing to back it up as well. As, indeed, three of those present had done already.

Instinctively, Harry found himself seeking out the faces of those who had flatly refused to let him go to the Department of Mysteries alone that night Sirius died. Had it really been only less than a month ago? Neville, Ginny, Luna, and Harry currently shared a particular bond the others had not yet been able to. He again found himself wondering why he'd never bothered noticing their strength before. And again, his inner qualms that bubbled up were abated. They really could do this. Together.

Harry looked back at the mirror in Ginny's hands and noticed the fourth and final square in the bottom right had been filled with an image as well. He pointed toward it to show the others. "Hey, that's what my wand looked like before...well, before...." he faded away, as they all gave various signs of comprehension.

Dean said, "Yes, we'd heard you'd had to do a few 'modifications' to it." His smiled and continued, "Using your glasses to hold the broken wand pieces together...sheer brilliance." The rest of them answered in kind as Harry shyly looked down and tried not to smile back at them. Yes, it had rather been more than just luck that he had managed to summon the Knight Bus with...

"What do you suppose it means?" spoke up Susan, "The other images are obviously tenses, but this piece of the puzzle doesn't seem to fit."

Everybody made various noises of disgruntled agreement, but at least it was more out of annoyance than hopelessness.

"Harry, maybe we're supposed to find your wand. Remember how I told you it went missing? Well, it still hasn't been found. Perhaps that's the key to this whole thing." Ginny said this urgently, and it caught Harry's attention.

Then Justin stepped forward a bit self-consciously. "The poem said something about 'what is seen leaves you mystified, remember to cipher the wrapper inside.' Well," he went on, holding up an empty sweets wrapper, "here it is, then."

"Hey, where'd you find that?" questioned Michael loudly.

Justin looked sheepish and replied, "In the other box half I had." His cheeks coloured just slightly, "But I thought somebody had just left their rubbish in it."

Instead of being annoyed, they all sniggered with Justin's mistaken assessment of the situation.

"I wonder what it means, though?" threw in Luna.

It was a bit galling to have her say that question aloud. It was usually Luna who seemed to know the answers to everything, even if the answers were a tad on the mental side sometimes. Everybody had come to see Justin was holding a wrapper which had once contained a piece of Drooble's Best Blowing Gum.

"No," Neville said, with completely uncharacteristic vehemence, "I know what this means! I know! It...I just..."

Ginny and Harry looked at each other, embarrassed for Neville. They alone knew why he was making such a deal out of the gum wrapper. Longbottom's mother, who was a terminal mental patient at St. Mungo's, had apparently given Neville these wrappers regularly for several years. The others seemed to pick up on Harry's and Ginny's feelings of self-consciousness for Neville's outburst, and promptly filed suit.

"Don't look at me that way!" Neville spoke up to the rest of them, exasperation tingeing his voice, "I know what I'm talking about, and I just can't think how to show you."

Suddenly, Harry was struck with a sinister inspiration, as he was studying his black wand after pretending to have ignored Neville. He

spun about and stepped off to one side, so he would have plenty of room for this.

Wondering if Ginny would even remotely recognise what he was doing, he wrote out the words “Drooble’s Best Blowing Gum” midair in front of them all, in flaming green foot-high letters. Feeling like he was personally violating all present with his actions, he flashed a last fiery glance back at them and swished the wand through the centre of the lettering, exactly as he’d watched the memory of Tom Riddle do, just over four years previous in the Chamber of Secrets.

Everyone shared a long, drawn-out inhalation of air, as they watched the letters rearrange themselves into the words, “Gold Bribe Below St. Mungo’s.” Turning back around slowly, Harry looked up meaningfully at them all and said, “Neville was right. Looks like we need to take a little detour to hospital,” he said, attempting to lighten the sombre mood which had draped itself over them all.

Then he walked straight up to Neville and apologised, “Sorry to have doubted you, mate,” and finished with what he’d hoped was an encouraging smile.

While what Harry had just done with the black wand had been necessary, it was also a bit unnerving; copying the exact actions of someone he had reason to hate, loathe, and despise above all others.

Neville, shocked to silence at having finally been not only believed, but asked for forgiveness, simply nodded wonderingly at him.

“Enough for wasting time,” Ginny came forward, taking charge again, “we need to get some people for this thing too.... Does anybody know how to get to the Leaky Cauldron, or Diagon Alley from here? At least we can find my family and Hermione—“ everybody winced ”—and explain what’s going on, and where we will have gone.”

The poem never specifically said they’d had to go anywhere, so this was disconcerting. Justin and Seamus each stepped forward as Justin said, “we each have Muggle parents, and know our way around Muggle and wizard London quite well. In fact, we were just going to pay fare for a regular bus with Muggle money, and meet

back at the Leaky Cauldron after we got done here. We can do that now.” Michael spoke up and volunteered to go with them as well.

Ginny nodded and said, “Okay, and once you convince them, they can find others too, and do so much faster because they can Apparate! Go!”

The three boys nodded and spun around, sprinting through the graveyard and dodging tombstones as they went.

Harry looked at Ginny in utter confusion and said, “Whilst I really don’t have a penchant for travelling the Knight Bus—“ he closed his eyes at the irony that his last memories of being alive were on that lurid, manky, old bus, “—why can’t they just summon it here?”

Susan answered this time, as Ginny appeared to have clammed up and was incapable of doing so.

“Well, the Knight Bus was grounded by the Ministry, after having involved themselves in the debacle that was your car crash,” she explained reluctantly, a pained expression on her face.

“Was there anybody in this whole bloody world who wasn’t punished for helping me?” Harry demanded in a fit of pique to anyone who would listen.

Dean came forward and said, “Harry, they didn’t get punished for helping you. They got made into examples by the Ministry, because they are two of your strongest supporters.” Gawping at Dean, Harry tried to picture in his mind, Ernie and Shunpike as being even remotely supportive of him. “They essentially got punished for not having denounced you publicly in court. They were interrogated too, you know,” ended Dean meaningfully.

Woah. Apparently it pays to be nice to people, even after they’ve been complete dung-for-brains berks to you. Pizza-faced Stan and goggles-for-glasses Ernie. Just imagine.

“So does anyone know where St. Mungo’s is from here?” spoke up Ginny, taking control of the situation as usual.

They all looked around at one another and came to the realisation that the only people who knew their way fully around both versions of London had already left them all behind. Dean wasn't any better-versed about wizard locations than Harry, as he too had been raised during his primary years as a Muggle.

Neville said, "I know it's not too awfully far from here, we could walk probably...but I always get turned around," he said forlornly, "it's the buildings!" he finished with a helpless gesture.

Ostensibly defeated once again, by simple negligence, Harry heard something make a seemingly indignant froofing noise behind him.

Comprehension dawned, and he was again wholly inspired—but by a decidedly lighter source this time. He turned toward Neville and said with utmost assuredness, "It's all right," he licked his lips anticipantly, "I don't know the way either, but I know someone here who does."

Neville looked over at him; face awash with hope and misery. Clearly he didn't quite believe what he was hearing.

Eyes bright and with the barest hint of smile, Harry turned around, looked up at the maker of the froof-noise and inquired, "So how about it, old girl? Would you care to show us the way?"

Hedwig looked down at him regally, from her perch on the top of the headstone. Apparently quite pleased that he had finally "got it", she twinkled her wizened eyes and preened a bit more out of typically characteristic spite. Harry shook his head at her and grinned. Trust Hedwig to teach you a lesson in patience, even if you're dead. "Now, if you please?"

Swiftly, Hedwig winked, called out to them all, and soared above their heads in a breathtaking flash of white and wing.

Dear Readers,

A few notes before you continue. First I would like to thank all whom left me reviews. They are, as always, greatly appreciated and looked forward to.

Next I would like to point out a few things of this chapter. I apologise for it being somewhat lengthy, but dividing it up just wasn't very plausible, as mostly everything in this chapter happened in roughly the same place, and roughly the same time frame.

Also, this chapter was, although extremely fun, immensely challenging to write. After seven chapters of the morbidity of having a dead Harry, I felt there needed to be a transitioning, somehow. A way to point out that our favourite hero still has spunk, light, life. But doing so required a literary upgrading of the terms that I chose, so I could signify Harry's fight for vitality.

I felt the best way to do that was through the speech and interaction of Harry with his friends. Otherwise this chapter would just drag on and on.

So everybody knows the singular most peculiar thing which separates youth from the adults is the way they speak (look, act, think.) And many of the lingo I know most young people share is something my mother affectionately refers to as "moviespeak."

It's a term she coined when I was 11 years old, when seemingly everything my friends/siblings said or heard reminded us of something in a movie or tv show, and we would quickly parrot it to each other and laugh like maniacs after having done so. I still do it to this very day. (I KEEL YOU!)

As a result, I am not entirely certain how "British" this chapter is, but make a challenge to yourself; see if you can pick out all of the seemingly random placements of cinemagic attitude. Enjoy, Rae

BREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAK

Central London sure seemed insanely busy this time of night. Though Harry still felt that weird tiredness thing, he was still retaining the otherworldly ability for not feeling winded, regardless of how much he ran. Instead he felt an entirely different kind of exhaustion. It was pulling on him, but still he fought it. And as a result, oddly enough, he found himself requiring “breaks” as all his friends did, in their flight to St. Mungo’s.

Due to this different nature, it was still somewhat difficult for him to gauge when his quite alive, quite windable friends needed a rest. Thankfully, however, Hedwig always seemed to know exactly when to stop for all of them to have a “breather”, as it were.

They all moved shockingly swiftly through the crowded, pulsing streets. Harry suspected the biggest reason for this was of his ghostly state. Whenever he got too close to a living person, they would leap out of the way after feeling the biting cold which seemed to bleed off him, as if he were an ambulatory block of frozen carbon dioxide. Harry had known the feeling of the “Poltergeist effect” quite well, having been touched by Nearly Headless Nick shortly after Harry’s sorting into Gryffindor House first year.

This was more effective than using a bullhorn; it even rivalled having Hagrid with you as a travelling companion, and Hagrid could part crowds effortlessly. Normally, much shouting and protest follows people who try to move through streets in such a quick manner. But he and Hedwig seemed to work in near-unison, she pausing when Ginny and the others needed rest, and he running across the people far enough ahead to clear a path.

There were several close-calls and disconcerting run-throughs even for him, when people would walk or almost walk straight through him. Or they might wave an arm or object and it would shoom past, causing Harry to flinch in a most violent manner. It was as if he could glimpse the things that passed through him on a molecular level. He could see vessels, blood, bone, and pulsing organs as people wrenched through him, and it was more than unnerving to say the least. As much as it bothered the living to be touched by Harry, he would swear that it affected his psyche at least ten times more. He

wondered how on earth ghosts got used to it, or if he was the only one who experienced the horrible sensation in this manner.

The further out from city centre the group moved, the more the crowds thinned out and the streets became a bit less lit. Harry studiously ignored their whispered questions about his now-braided appearance and why he'd had to run with them, instead of reappearing where he wanted to at will. Ginny whispered sternly "mind your own business" or "he's still new at this ghost-thing, just work with it", and various such answers. He was rather glad the girl was sparing him the explanations, as he really didn't have any to give them.

At last they got to the manky old building without too much trouble. The journey was just quite a bit longer than they had anticipated. The retail district was also mostly deserted at this hour, much opposed to the heart of the city. Hedwig perched on a burned out street lamp nearby; Harry suspected the lamp's condition wasn't that way on accident. Someone had probably made sure it stayed out, specifically so magicfolk would be able to come here unnoticed.

Harry's friends stood outside the decrepit red-brick structure of Purge and Dowse, Ltd. Everything was as he and Weasleys had seen before when having visited, only more so than usual. The signs and wigs of the dummies in the windows hung even more askew, and the fashions that they wore seemed even more ancient than usual, if possible. As Harry studied all this, his winded friends each caught their breath.

"So what now?" questioned Ginny. Staring at the female entrance mannequin, Harry just shook his head, at a loss.

"I suppose we'll...just have to make up something about seeing someone, so she'll let us in," suggested Neville.

Susan spoke up, "Were there any names on those documents you looked at? Maybe we're supposed to use one of those."

Dean replied, "Yeah, maybe that's the key—"

“That might be fine,” responded Harry, still looking through the pane of glass, “except the names mentioned are either Muggles, or dead people,” he reminded, subdued.

“Yeah,” Ginny said, voice full of sardonic meaning, “and everyone knows that you can’t go to see a dead man, you can’t see their reflections in mirrors, and above all—” her voice rose as Harry turned around to look at her, “you can’t talk to one.” Slowly, she strode purposefully up to him and added severely, “Am I right?” Her eyes widened hugely up at him.

A colossal silence filled the air around them, as they soaked up the meaning of Ginny’s last words. She had effectively pointed out they had soundly accomplished her said impossible feats already. Managing incredible tasks appeared to be something this particular group thrived on.... After all, Harry himself wasn’t exactly alive at the moment.

Harry Potter, Dead Man Talking, he thought to himself ironically. The Mugglish cinematic reference just fit too perfectly.

Luna, who had been very quiet, was holding out the signed page of the adoption papers. She said, “What you wager it’s the name that you said had the crown icon by it?”

There Luna went again, pointing out the cleverly obvious. Harry heard his own brain thunk into place as she’d said her question. Lightbulbs went off over his other friend’s heads too. Crown on the adoption cert, crown on back of the death cert, who knew? Maybe they were all interrelated with getting into St. Mungo’s.

Luna stepped forward to the glass and read off the name on the cert. They all waited apprehensively for the ugly mannequin to respond appropriately. It took an abnormally long time, but finally the dummy winked and gestured them forward with her finger. The group let out a collective sigh of relief, never having realised they were each holding their breath.

Watching each of his friends walk through the glass, Harry wondered how the waterfall-like sensation of doing so would feel to him now he

was a ghost. Shutting his eyes, he stepped over the threshold, and was assailed with the pictures of what he was passing through, even without his eyes open. He saw the glass on that almost molecular level, same as other things, but mercifully it didn't last nearly as long, since panes of glass are only so thick. Stumbling, Harry met his other friends in St. Mungo's reception area. They all looked at him concernedly, automatically coming to help him, only realising too late there was nothing they could do.

"It's all right," Harry answered, waving them off. It wasn't their fault he was dead. Walking through things seemed to be the singular most draining thing he had felt thus far, however. Harry wondered just how much more of it he could take.

The whole of them sort of bummed around together for a bit, wondering what they should do, but nobody really paid them the slightest attention. The interior of the hospital was scarcely less busy than the last time Harry had been there. Apparently it didn't matter what time of day or night it was. This place was going to be crowded, regardless.

They walked over to the directory sign for the floors, for lack of something else to do. Mostly it was because they didn't want the Welcome Witch getting suspicious and thinking they were loitering.

Dean said impatiently, "Ah, we don't have time for this. You two—" he said, pointing toward Ginny and Harry, "didn't you say you couldn't see the cert clues until you had your wands together? Maybe that's what you should do now. Maybe there's something on the sign you can't see unless you do so. It's worth a shot," he shrugged.

Harry and Ginny looked at him, each other, and then took out their wands and lighted them, "Lumos!" and held them out to the sign. They couldn't tell a single thing. Ginny groaned in exasperation and stamped her foot. "It's too bright in here! You can't see anything!"

The rest of them kept determinedly straight faces, as Ginny had completely failed to recognise the ridiculousness of her last two statements.

Neville came forward and instead of sharing their consternation, he said, “No problem. We can fix that. Remember the Crasher Jinx that Harry taught the D.A.?”

They all looked around at each other as understanding dawned, and exchanged looks of utter satisfaction. How could Harry have forgotten? That little hex he'd taught them all should do nicely. He only hoped they wouldn't be disrupting the flow of hospital too much. They'd only be taking out just a small section of things, really.

Each of them then positioned themselves at the appropriate places on the floor, held their wands toward the ceiling panels and canted, “Implodus!”

Pandemonium broke loose as the lights in the surrounding reception area went completely black. It was only six panels, so the room wasn't plunged into total darkness or anything.

Harry and his friends all slunk back quietly over to the sign, calmness in the face of disruption. The Welcome Witch hurriedly came out from behind her desk to get all the awaiting patients to simmer down.

This time, Harry and the group saw small glowing green icons on the bottom of the sign. Straight below the designation for the fifth floor, there was a serpent, coiling in and around a crown. Everyone shared another inhalation of air, as they realised the picture they saw eerily seemed a cousin of the Dark Mark. And it was also burned into the sign, much like the Mark was burned into the arms of the Death Eaters.

Instead of a long description as the rest of the floors, there was only a small number beside it. It read, “WD51RM57C.”

“Well, that's just ruddy brilliant,” Ginny said irritably, but quietly, “so, what does it mean?”

Sighing in an “oh pur-leeese” fashion, Susan stepped forward and educated them all again. “Honestly people, it's a designator. Ward 51, Room 57C.” The others sheepishly exchanged looks, mentally slapping their foreheads. Luna automatically took it upon herself to go

and ask the Welcome Witch precisely where Ward 51 was. The witch was not pleased.

“What a load of laughs you are. Here we are in the half-darkness, and you’re trying to be clever. Hospital ward numbers stop at 50, as you well know, on fourth floor. And any room that starts with ‘5’ is on fifth, while ‘C’ means a closet.”

She turned away from Luna without a second glance, trying to help her fellow employees calm everyone down until the lights came back on. It was only then it occurred on Harry they probably could’ve used the lightswitch instead of a jinx. Once again realising too late, Harry recalled that he still hadn’t quite learned the value of thinking things clear through since second year, when he and Ron had taken the Ford Anglia for an unexpected drive. But then again, it would’ve taken them more time they didn’t have to find the lightswitches...

Now they were effectively stumped again. Mainly as a reason to keep busy and feel useful, Dean suggested they all start on the fifth floor, and try to find that closet.

As they were all slinking toward the staircase, the lights suddenly came back on, amidst many half-hearted cheers in the waiting room. It struck Harry as ultimately funny that he was still with his friends and causing trouble, just the same as always. They ran quickly up the stairs toward the top.

Harry found himself missing Ron and Hermione something fierce, however. A lot. The two of them should really be here with them. He quietly told Ginny as much. A small pained look crossed her features, and she pressed her lips together and nodded, as the look passed quickly as it had come. Clearly, her calm façade was taking its toll.

They had another close call with somebody in the stairwell, but Harry quickly solved that problem by reaching out to touch them. His friends pressed themselves against the wall while he ran up the two intervening flights of steps and scared the living daylights out of the hapless visitor above them. Harry decided he was beginning to feel distinctly Peeves-like at the moment.

Shuffling off onto fifth floor, everybody gawked around at the vast yet near-empty tearoom, with its small rickety tables and equally shabby unmatched armchairs. The surroundings looked like cast-offs from an old Muggle second-hand shop, and were all tinted the singular most garish colours imaginable. The weak moonlight coming in the two small windows only drew out the luridity of the olive drab, tangerine, and fluorescent pink psychedelic shades.

Every surface appeared to be covered in something home-made, whether it be blankets, throws, pillows, or tea cosies; everything was patch-worked, latch-hooked, knitted, or crocheted. The wall paneling itself was a distinctly outdated dark brown wainscoting. And was that some actual String-Art he saw over there on that wall...? Not a single thing coordinated, but the nickelodeon of colour all just seemed to fit together somehow, giving off an air that was unmistakably...kitschy.

The dim lighting served to enhance Harry's feeling that the only things this place was missing were curtains of lovebeads and curling swirls of incense. Oh yeah, and don't forget lava lamps. Even the music softly playing over the loudspeakers sounded almost Ravi Shankar-like. Ambiance: groovy, baby.

"May I please have a spoon?" asked a small wizard of the dumpy, haggard-looking witch who was standing behind the tearoom's ordering counter.

"I gave you one with it," she answered him crossly.

"But there is no spoon."

Harry and his friends all decided it was best to split up a bit and paired off to see if they could find anything. Neville and Luna went into the small gift shop; Dean and Susan went over to the side of the tearoom where the ordering counter was, whilst Harry and Ginny inspected the walls opposite them.

As a matter of course, Ginny and Harry held their wands out, once again determining if the combined effect would reveal something the naked eye couldn't see. The two of them skulked about the walls, mostly holding their wands toward the junction of where the walls met

the floor, as that appeared to be the only thing not draped in afghans or tatting work.

They were nearing one particularly loud rag quilt on the wall, with chartreuse Snitches and magenta Quaffles, when a large, ugly, solitary, hunchbacked individual in the corner called out to Ginny.

“What’re you on about?” scraped a horrid sounding voice. Harry and Ginny winced; it was that disturbing. Witch or warlock, it was hard to tell. Ginny tried to ignore it, but it was quite difficult to ignore something that sounded like a steel slide guitar getting strummed with a cheese grater.

“I said, what are you looking for?” Rake on a blackboard. Harry was sure glad of his ghostly state at the moment; the vocal quality of this one-eyed weirdo would be physically painful to the human ear right now.

“Nothing, just...lost my contact lense,” Ginny muttered hastily; anything to get this nosey individual to shut up.

“I don’t see any contact lenses,” scratched the voice, “but perhaps I can tell you what I do see. First tell me, who’s your friend?”

Harry and Ginny whirled around, startled. Nobody had paid the slightest attention to Harry’s presence up to now. Could this weird person really see him? Just as quickly, Harry figured this couldn’t be the case. After all, he and Ginny had come into the tearoom with four other perfectly visible people.

“Who? You mean them?” inquired Ginny, gesturing around vaguely to the other members of their party. She had evidently come to the same conclusion Harry had.

“No, I mean that one,” and the person pointed straight at Harry. Ginny darted a look at him. Rather than wasting time with pointless questions, she automatically determined it was worth it to keep this stranger speaking, for the moment. Painful though it was.

“Oh, him?” Ginny said, note of dryness creeping into her voice. “That’s just...Casper, the friendly ghost.” Harry rolled his eyes at the inane joke. Typical Weasley sarcasm. Best to be obtuse, to test how much this odd person knows.

Then the foreigner issued forth the most distressing sound yet. It sounded how Crookshanks sounded; Crookshanks, if he were being trampled by stampeding centaurs. Shoulders were giving a telltale shake. Was it this individual’s version of...laughter?

“In any case,” continued the character, still amused, “what you seek is straight over there.” Now the finger pointed toward the psyched-out Quidditch quilt, and the person leaned almost menacingly forward across the small table in front of them.

“Do not deny the Imperius Curse,” the horrible grating sound was completely absent now, to be replaced by a dark mellifluous baritone. “For what he needs requires it,” the voice emphasized. It was so intense, but still sounded oddly...familiar somehow.

Ginny and Harry glanced over toward the quilt on the wall, but when they looked back, the mysterious visitor had gone.

How had a complete stranger known what they were doing here? How had he known what Harry and his friends were trying to accomplish? And what did all of those cryptic words mean? Denying the Imperius Curse...?

“Who was that?” inquired someone behind their backs. Evidently, the other four friends had caught some semblance of the conversation with this singularly remarkable person.

“Hey, you guys won’t believe this weird picture they’re selling in the gift shop. It’s this tripped out ink on a black fuzzy background...it looks like Dobby’s portrait. I think they call it a...a ‘Velvet Elvish’...” trailed off Neville, completely off-topic.

“I don’t know, but let’s check things out,” Ginny pressed on, ignoring Neville’s interjection and marching straight over to the quilt on the wall. “Harry, the wand, if you will.”

All of them looked around, to make sure they weren't being watched. They peeled back the quilt from the wall, and by the light of Ginny and Harry's wands, they could see a vague outline of a door behind it. Next to it was a small, dingy placard, which read, "WD51." Next to the number was the burned in modified Dark Mark with the crown.

"Well, well" said Dean. "I wonder how St. Mungo's staff would feel if they knew about a hidden ward, right here in the hospital."

"I wouldn't be so sure that all of them aren't aware of it," Neville countered, voice full of meaning. They all stared at him for a bit. That was definitely a sobering thought.

A simple "Alohomora" spell later, they had all followed each other through the door into a dank and empty hallway. Everything was coated in thick layers of dust and cobwebs, and the only indicator this place had been used recently was the cleared path in the dark stuff on the floor by the door and footprints leading down the corridor. Each of the party had lit their wands now, as the stuffy, narrow space was so devoid of light.

They really didn't know how far they had travelled, but the only thing in this otherwise featureless corridor was a solitary door at the end. That was it. And a sign on it said 57C.

"Ten galleons that's not really a closet," Dean said sardonically.

They all responded with sarcastic variations of "no kidding" and "you really think so?"

Next Susan reached for the handle—which shockingly opened without any trouble, and behind the door was—a closet. Complete with all type of ancient cleaning supplies.

"Well, isn't that just jim-dandy," said Harry wryly. "It's a ruddy closet after all."

Susan shut the door again, and they all leaned cautiously against the filthy cramped walls, thinking what to do next. It was generally

obvious that room wasn't just a closet; they just had to figure out the next trick to do. Neville paced the tiny patch of floor in front of the door.

Suddenly, somebody's stomach rumbled into the semi-darkness.

"Sorry," apologised Neville sheepishly. "It's been awhile since I ate. Can't remember when last I did. I keep forgetting to ever since, well...you know."

Everybody looked at Longbottom and vehemently murmured their sympathy. They also each avoided looking in Harry's direction for a bit. It was only then he realised what they were all referring to, and the unspoken words they had each mentally tacked onto Neville's last statement: Ever since Harry died. It was unspeakably humbling to think your departure could affect those you cared about in such a drastic way.

There was that uncomfortable silence again. But before it could get too deep, Dean pushed himself off the wall and yanked the door open, just for kicks.

He froze, then called out over his shoulder, "Erm, guys? It's not a closet anymore."

"What"? they all questioned.

"Look," he answered, and pushed the small door open fully.

Instead of a dreary little supply closet, what they were glimpsing now was a cosy dining room, decked out with table settings and food for much more than the five of them.

"Neville," Ginny spun him around suddenly, and placed her hands on both sides of his head, "you're a genius!" Then she pulled him down and planted a big happy kiss straight on his forehead, and released him as quickly as she had begun.

"I...am?" he stuttered, dazedly rubbing the spot where Ginny had kissed him.

“Yes!” she responded excitedly. Then Harry heard her repeat some of the odd words the stranger said, “...for what he needs requires it...this isn’t a closet, it’s a Room of Requirement! And you figured it out!”

“All I wanted was a snack...” Neville trailed off lamely.

Ginny shut the door again, amongst half-joking protests from everybody present. “Priorities, people,” Ginny reminded them all, once again sounding almost Hermione-like. What she said next was all Weasley, however. “First: bring your friends back to life; then you can eat.” The dryness of her tone could’ve peeled paint.

Everyone sniggered in spite of everything, including Harry. It still fascinated him that belying the urgency and gravity of the present situation, they were still laughing it up together.

“Again,” spoke up Ginny, “what we need to do is concentrate. We need to find that broken wand now, remember?”

She had taken up Neville’s place in front of the door, paced back and forth as they all thought about finding Harry’s holly wand.

When she opened the door back up, it was the inside of an old elevator. The once-posh interior included faded brocade wall covering and a tarnished brass handrail, which spanned all three walls. Thankfully the space was large enough to accommodate all of them, and even give Harry a spot of his own. It also had its own interior lighting, but they still kept their wands out just in case.

They climbed inside it and saw only a single button on the inside panel. And on it was a tiny glowing impression of that weird, modified Dark Mark.

It was clear what they had to do, but that didn’t mean that they were any happier about doing it. Luna reached out, pressed the button, and said, “Here we go.”

Even though he couldn't feel it, Harry saw the elevator give a telltale jerk as his friends reacted to it. "We're moving down...fast," said Susan, and they all agreed, as they clutched the railing.

Further and further they descended, not knowing where they were going or when they would stop. Idle conversation simply dropped off after a few minutes, as nobody really had anything else to say, and tension seemed to squeeze off any thought other than apprehensiveness.

At last the lift came to a halt, and slowly the doors in front of them opened. Harry and Ginny were the last to leave the elevator, but after they got a full view of just where they had gone, Ginny immediately shrank back in complete fear.

"No..." she whispered, all of her former bravado having shriveled up on the spot.

And Harry shared her terror, as none of them could. For although their surroundings were slightly different, slightly altered, there was no mistaking that which it was a brother of.

"Not another Chamber of Secrets..!"

Dear Readers,

Did you like the last chapter? From the responses of a few, what I got was positive. Thank you to all who reviewed. As a result of whatever demon has possessed me, I have done two chapter postings in less than a week. I don't know why.

Also I wanted to let you all know if you have any questions regarding my fic, I shall answer them the best I can, as long as what you ask does not give away any major story points or I simply just want you to fill out the rest of the details using your own imaginations. It makes it more fun that way!

Depending on how you ask, I shall personally respond whether it be in the next author notes, or personally if we happen to hook up in email or on Mugglenet chat. So remember: If you have loads of questions, feel free to email me--my email is on my profile page. Thank you all, and once again, Enjoy your read! Love, Rae ;)

BREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAK
BREAK

All of the rest of the group turned around to stare at Harry and Ginny.

"You mean this is what the Chamber of Secrets looked like?" inquired Susan, now gaining a completely new fearful respect for their already scare-inspiring surroundings.

Harry, knowing they needed to have more information about their latest environment, swallowed and determined to answer them. Just as soon as he could help Ginny get over her shock. It was very disconcerting to see her in this condition; she had effectively been the glue binding the group together....

Most amazingly however, she had already seemingly shoved most of her fear back into the elevator as she left it again. "It's okay, I'm all right," she answered shakily but bravely, trying to stave off their attempts at assistance. Harry felt bad he couldn't do anything more than offer words of encouragement.

Then he began to answer all of the inquiries. "This is very similar to the Chamber of Secrets under Hogwarts, but it's still different."

"Yes," Ginny continued, "the overall architecture was different, but...this is still so...similar...." she trailed off.

Nodding agreement, Harry continued, "The old chamber also was made of this same thick granite brick and covered in slime... there were loads of diverting tunnels, just like we see here." Except instead of being lots of miles under the lake, they were miles under London....

Everyone basically stayed silent as Harry and Ginny continued the comparison of the two locations. She glanced at him meaningfully and muttered, "I wouldn't be entirely surprised if they were connected, somehow." This possibility, if that's what you could call it, was extremely remote. Especially considering the two sites of London and Hogwarts were hundreds of miles apart. But this was Voldemort and Salazar they were discussing here. Not exactly namby-pamby stuff.

The group stepped over to the most imposing artifact in the cavernous room. It was a porthole type doorway, just as in the original chamber, complete with realistic-looking snakes built into the access panels. But this one had a feature on it that was completely unlike the one in the Chamber of Secrets. A flat picture of a golden crown was in the centre of the rounded doorplate.

"I wonder what all the crowns mean..." Ginny murmured aloud.

Then Dean said, "Were the crowns not in the Chamber of Secrets?"

Ginny and Harry responded with an emphatic, "No."

Harry said, "Logically, it looks like the only way we're going to get through that access way is with a little bit of Parseltongue."

Neville turned to him and said, "Is that how you did it before...?"

Nodding Harry said, "Yep." Then he gestured everyone to step aside so he could stand alone in front of the doorway. "Allow me, please."

He stared hard at the bejeweled eyes of the largest metallic snake in front of him, and drew to the surface that talent which so few humans possessed.

Open sesame! Harry thought at the serpent. The hissing words came to him easier than they ever had before. He was surprised at how little concentration it required. But oddly enough, the access hatch remained shut. He tried again. OPEN SESAME! he repeated, vehemently as one could manage in snake language.

The snakes still didn't give any hint of movement. This was despite the fact Harry even felt a bit of energy drain off him as he'd said the words. Strange.

After a third and equally fruitless attempt, Harry's friends stepped forward and used every charm they could think of (and even a few made-up on the spot) to try and open that doorway, but it was no use. The thing wouldn't budge.

Ginny had been uncharacteristically reticent this entire time, choosing instead to watch as the others took action. Harry could hardly blame her; the Chamber of Secrets had been some of his worst past encounters, too. Being here was dredging up the darkest memories the girl had ever had the misfortune to experience. And it didn't matter to Ginny that she'd not been personally responsible for what had happened to those people during second year. It was obvious to someone like Harry that she still felt all of that telltale shame and guilt. Her very countenance reflected all the signs of a now surmounted, but no less recallable weakness. For it was Lord Voldemort's most unforgettable legacy: Pain.

Ginny was now sitting on a relatively slime-free ledge that went along the bottom of the wall, staring at the floor in a slightly lost way. Harry slowly walked over and crouched down so he would be level with her.

"You okay?" he inquired kindly. It seemed an utterly useless thing to ask, but he didn't know what else to do.

Ginny's answer had nothing to do with his question, however. "Do not deny the Imperius Curse..." she continued looking at the floor as she repeated the stranger's last words softly aloud.

"Pardon?"

She blinked hard, and then looked straight into his eyes. "Don't you understand, Harry?" He just lifted his eyebrows and gazed at her, inviting her to elaborate.

Swallowing, she continued, "The only thing that's going to open that door is Parseltongue." He nodded, intending to debate the issue, since snake language was obviously not working at this point. But Ginny went on.

"Parseltongue from a living person. And one of us needs to do it, since you can't."

Harry felt his heart skip a beat (amazed that sensation hadn't left him). Surely...Ginny couldn't mean what she was implying. Slowly he straightened back up, paced a bit, and replied, "But none of you is a Parselmouth. How can you...?"

Ginny continued to eye him. "That's where the Imperius Curse comes in. You're going to have to use it on one of us so we can open that door." She then stood up to her full height, and said valiantly, "Since I've already spoken Parseltongue before, I volunteer to be the one you choose."

Harry wanted to yell, wanted to shout, wanted to scream at her that she was all wrong about this, but he didn't. Not so deep down, he knew that each word Ginny was saying was true. Do not deny the Imperius Curse...for doing so meant certain death for him if he did. Ginny was right. But that didn't mean he would ever do it.

"No," he exacted loudly, "that is something I could never ask, let alone require of anyone; much less a friend or someone I respect. So please, just forget about it. Nobody will have to volunteer for something like that because I won't do it." Then he faltered just a bit, and scratched out, "I...can't...do it."

Taking slow yet purposeful steps toward him, Ginny replied understandingly, but with even more intent, "No, Harry. I know you can't." It was nice to know, if a tad bittersweet, that he didn't have to argue the point with her anymore—Harry had been expecting some more of Ginny's spitfire over meritoriously using an Unforgivable Curse on someone. But then she pointed to his scar and continued in a steely tone, "But he can."

The words cracked like a whip between them; there could be no mistake. The "he" that Ginny had just mentioned was, quite plainly, Lord Voldemort.

Even though the rest of their friends didn't understand exactly what was happening, they seemed to sense the need to stay quiet. The person who best knew to deal with this was already speaking with Harry.

It was the most incomprehensible and upsetting thing of all that he could still be infested with the taint of Voldemort, even in death. Was there no end to the Evil One's influence? Why didn't Voldemort just get it bloody over with, and kill him outright? Or maybe spiritual torment was something he happened to specialise in. There must be something to that, or Lord Voldemort would've succeeded in murdering Harry along with his parents back in Godric's Hollow, all those years ago.

As Harry battled with himself, something else came to him. Ginny had essentially pointed out that awful, mental link between he and his hated enemy. Up to this point, it had been used on him repeatedly, to torture Harry with images of physical suffering, mental anguish, to twist his thought patterns and manipulate him. And now Sirius was gone as a result of it. But...could there be that possibility, however remote, Harry could...turn Voldemort's own powers against him?

The realisation of this must've shown on his face, because Ginny spoke up again, in a small triumphant voice. "Yes," she said, smiling slightly, "you see, it can be done. V-Voldemort," she winced as she made herself say it, and Harry nearly started in surprise, "was the

proprietor of your so-called death, and...now you can...throw it over on him, to bring yourself back.”

Then Luna said, her eyes burning importantly, “You have to do this, Harry. To your enemies, the best revenge is living well. Especially if they already consider you dead. It’s poetic justice.”

This time, the others started sponsorship of Ginny’s cause. “Yeah. Listen to them, Harry. I don’t pretend to understand all of what’s going on, but if anybody deserves to get one over on You-Know-Who, it would be you,” Neville stressed. Most of the others murmured agreement with him.

Harry knew he was hardly the only person to suffer at the hands of Voldemort and his Death Eaters. And here was Neville, who himself had lost so much due to Bellatrix Lestrange torturing his own mum and dad into insanity, supporting him without hesitation.

Also, Ginny had known she was the logical choice to handle this kind of a curse. She was a strong person and knew precisely what she was getting into. The girl had been under Voldemort’s influence already, for nearly an entire school year, and lived to tell about it. Ironically enough, that was also largely due to Harry’s personal intervention.... That really didn’t make this much easier though, if at all.

Before he could change his mind, or even make it up, really—Ginny strode over purposefully to stand in front of the access hatch.

“Okay,” she said, shutting her eyes and balling her hands into fists, “I’m ready. Let’s get this over with.”

Slightly dazed, Harry followed her. Was he really going to do this? Put an Unforgivable Curse on another being just for his own purposes? Deserving or not, it still seemed unspeakably cruel to put someone under his own will. This wasn’t against Ginny’s will though, technically. Harry stretched out his arm, black wand held high.

He shut his own eyes, and reached down, down, through himself. Now was the time he had to find that—that thing...that unwelcome

monster that resided within him. But it was the monster, which he was just now starting to realise, as he went through this process, that was the very reason Harry was still not yet dead. Good Godric. So that was why Voldemort couldn't kill him. He'd be killing himself if he did.

"Waiting..." Ginny spoke up softly, cutting through Harry's inner war.

"Yeah, okay...okay." He responded, as if from a great depth, trying to focus on the situation.

Think of it. Coiled and ready, eye of the snake, fang of the snake, I am the snake—"IMPERIO!" shouted Harry as loudly as he could. He felt an indescribable drain on his reserves from somewhere close by as he bore down on his connection with Lord Voldemort. A resultant physical/psychiatric surge slammed into him. Ghost or no, dead or not, Harry screamed and fell to the floor in agony.

During his incantation, a radioactive green poured out the end of his wand. The slithering band of magic seemed almost sentient; it swirled around Ginny, starting its dance from the floor and coiling high into the air, finally settling down over her upper body in an almost loving way. Her features grew blank and dreamlike. It made Harry feel almost sick to think he'd been the cause of it. But he couldn't let the girl's sacrifice go unanswered; they had a job to finish.

Trembling harder than he'd ever thought himself capable, previous life or present, he pushed himself determinedly from the floor. Now Harry knew precisely what lay on the other side of that door. And it wasn't just his wand. It also answered the perplexing question of why he'd felt such a close-by draining of spirit. Through the mental connection, at least to Voldemort, Harry was still safe—untouchable. But the cold-blooded man had found a way to subvert that little detail. That unbelievable bastard.

Looking around fully for the first time, Harry saw the only one of his friends currently standing was...Ginny. She swayed, in her trance, midst huddling figures on the floor. Oh, no! Had that surge also caught his friends in its wake?

“Are all of you okay?” he called to them at-large, deeply concerned. The only responses he got were groggy moans. Revenge was a very risky business, apparently. Harry could only guess the reason why his friends had been subjected to this surge was because he no longer had physical form to contain it. Without the solidity of his body, Harry had not yet learned a way to deflect, let alone focus, power of such magnitude.

Okay, one thing at a time. He had to hurry up and open that door, so he could remove the wretched curse from Ginny. But before he could even turn back around, he heard a telltale ding! come from the elevator. Normally Harry would’ve ran and hid, but he knew living people couldn’t see him. Not unless he really wanted them to, anyway. That was something he’d managed to find out, however inadvertently.

He watched as three Death Eater robe-clad individuals emerged from the elevator. Apparently, it had closed back up and been summoned to the surface at hospital and his group hadn’t noticed.

The one individual in front turned around to the other two and addressed them. “What the...? Why is the Weasley girl here, and why is she standing in front of the door?”

Only it wasn’t a mature sounding voice at all. It was a voice Harry knew personally, all too well. That meant the other two behind the first one had to be—

“Dunno. Can we take the masks off now?” called out a dull, stupid-sounding bass.

“Yeah, it’s hard to breathe in here.”

“Fine, you great buffoons. If you want her to notice you, go straight ahead. I wonder why she hasn’t turned around...” the figure stepped forward, waving a hand in front of Ginny’s face. So busy were the three they failed to even notice the other figures on the stone and in the shadows, just behind them over there. Now Harry hoped his friends didn’t wake up.

This was quite unnerving; learning that the very worst of his classmates had known about this second chamber for who knew how long. What were they doing here? Surely they wouldn't be able to get into the chamber. Not without Parseltongue.

"It's okay," called the thin, tall one next to Ginny. "She can't see or hear anything. She's entranced—I think someone's put an Imperius Curse on her. I wonder who it was?" Then all three figures removed their head masks, thereby removing all doubt of their identities.

"Hey, I think it was bloody brilliant, having us dress up as Death Eaters the day we came back from school," said Goyle, and Crabbe sniggered darkly.

Draco's eyebrow arched and he replied coldly, "First of all, I don't 'dress up' as anything. Second of all, even though it hardly mattered in the end, as Potter never regained consciousness, it was a rather clever idea, wasn't it?" He gave his trademark smirk.

Harry's head swam with this new revelation. These three were directly involved with the car crash? Had they really been the ones to execute those curses Ginny had told him about?

"Yes," continued Draco arrogantly, "even though the Dark One didn't appreciate it at first," he winced slightly, and Harry found sinister pleasure in the fact that Voldemort had somehow punished Malfoy for his presumptions, "he eventually came around to see how my little plot for tagging 'St. Potter' as a murdering lunatic could work to his advantage." Clenching his teeth together and rolling his hand into a fist, Draco continued, "My only regret is the weak fool wasn't awake or sane enough for me to let him know I was the one who was truly responsible for what happened to him. Never mess with Malfoy," he spat, and punched his fist into the opposite open palm.

Harry saw blood-red. If he'd thought he was capable of feeling homicidal before, this was nothing in comparison to the ultimate, all-encompassing murderous rage he was feeling now. It seemed to perpetuate, and feed on itself in a never-ending tide of flame and fury. Despite the fact Voldemort had always been Harry's quintessential worst enemy, the man had chosen to single him out largely due to a

prophecy, rather than any initial dislike for him. Or at least that's how Harry chose to see it. For the moment, anyway.

With Draco however, it was very different. Harry had never done anything to him, short of existing, to provoke his definitive anger. Harry had made that last final mistake of actually having people believe him when he'd told them Lucius Malfoy was still a staunch supporter of Voldemort. And as a result, the younger Malfoy had not only sworn vengeance against Harry, but had gotten it by framing him for murder. On all counts. Draco's childhood enemy was not only practically dead, but all he had left behind, his friends, his reputation, everything—had been branded by the scourge of the Ministry's guilty verdict. And now Harry would make that rat mongrel pay for it. Dearly.

But just because one needed to dole out a bit of punishment didn't mean they had to go about it rashly, however. Even though Harry's right for justice writhed within him, he knew that he had to be very careful about the matter. Using just one spell via his mental link with Voldemort had near done him in, and Harry was already basically dead, for crying out loud.

No, this was one instance where ye olde tyme "Gung-ho Gryffindor" style would not do. Harry had long since learned that subtlety could work wonders, especially when it came to psychologically terrorizing someone. It would be much more satisfying to let Draco's and Crabbe's and Goyle's fear build slowly. Although not exactly quick to admit it, Harry had inadvertently discovered that little lesson with Dudley. Why bother wasting precious energy scaring someone, when they could just as easily scare themselves? So instead, Harry had to think this out more like...a Slytherin. There was going to be a bit of drama to it, all right. He began mentally reaching out to Ginny's subconscious.

Embracing his more ominous half had been something Harry was far too afraid to do when he was alive. He'd always felt that doing so would cause him to lose his true identity; Harry recalled his spat with the Sorting Hat over it. But that deviant mindset could be a boon to him now, and it had nothing to do with penchants for scheming.

(()) Hey, tiger lily. Are you there? (()) Harry hoped words of familiarity would draw a more favourable response from Ginny. A feeling of amused laughter filled his mind as he'd mentally asked the question of her. It sounded like twinkling bells.

:Harry, is that really you? Am I dreaming:

All the lightness in the world would never help Harry be able to stand his ground and bite back when he needed to. That was something only rock-hard grit could provide. And brother, did Harry Potter have grit. His untapped reserves of it ran deeper than even he could ever imagine.

(()) Sort of dreaming, sort of not. (()) Harry could tell that although Ginny was there, she still wasn't exactly aware of what was going on

around her. Best to keep it simple. (())But I need your help, in any case.()

:Name it. Consider it done.:

And it was as simple as that. Harry had known he could effectively do whatever he wanted to regarding her actions, but he figured it would be somewhat easier to accomplish if the subject in question was more willing to go along with it, self-aware or not. He didn't have endless energy to expend, after all. Having been on the wrong end of an Imperius Curse too many times himself (once was too many as far as he was concerned), Harry was also trying desperately not to hurt her.

(())Very well. We're dealing with Malfoy and his goons. They don't know we can see them, and we need something to grab their attention...() Her answering thought came almost immediately. Harry didn't know why he hadn't thought of it. (())Brilliance! Thank you.() Softly, he began to coax Ginny into humming a few bars of "Weasley is Our King".

Just as he'd hoped, Draco and company weren't in the slightest bit afraid when this started happening. On the contrary, they were quite amused. They just commenced walking around Ginny in lazy circles, chuckling amongst themselves, thinking that this was somehow all a big fat joke. Good. Let them.

As Harry had Ginny start singing the proper Gryffindor version of the tune, he consulted her deeper thought process again. This was definitely fascinating; communicating with someone on more than one level.

(())Okay, now we need something a bit darker, maybe hint to them they're being watched.() Again, Ginny gave him the "of course!" type feeling with her answer. It surprised him that the ancient little nursery rhyme she suggested applied to both Muggle and magic worlds.

"Ring around the rosies..." Ginny sang softly, in response to Harry's mental change of melody. The three Slythidiots laughed uproariously

and continued making snide remarks about the girl, most of them considering her lineage or intelligence.

“...pocket full of posies...”

Harry was careful to make sure Ginny was singing to Malfoy's steps, staying in rhythm each time a heel struck the floor. Judging by the gradual cessation of crude commentary, Draco wasn't taking long in noticing it.

“...ashes, ashes, we all fall down.” Malfoy stopped abruptly as the song faded, and Crabbe said, “This is so—”

“Shut up!” snapped Draco. His lack-witted companions fell silent.

As the arrogant blonde started walking again, so too did Harry have Ginny sing.

“Ring around the rosies...”

Draco said, “I think someone's watching us, or she's really awake. Notice how her song changes with my walking?” To demonstrate, he picked up his pace a bit. Concentrating a tad more intently, Harry had Ginny's song tempo do the same.

“...pocket full of posies...” Malfoy walked still faster.

“...ashes, ashes, we all fall down!” emphasized Ginny, and Harry sniggered as Draco started at her near-shout. Harry's amusement transmitted to Ginny and she giggled, which in turn unnerved Malfoy even more. But still, he appeared determined not to completely lose his cool, especially not in front of his drones.

“Stop pretending, Weasel-pest,” Draco mocked Ginny, slightly unsure of himself. Harry had just six words for that.

“Make me, you twitchy little ferret.” That was a decidedly non-Ginny retort, but Harry couldn't stand Malfoy's jeering of her family name anymore. It also served to make his nemesis think.

This nonplussed Malfoy to silence, it was so unexpected. Crabbe and Goyle were momentarily shocked even stupider and didn't do anything either. How dare a lesser witch insult Draco? Especially one who was alone and defenceless. At least one of them seemed to realise that Ginny's eyes had been closed the entire time, however. Words and actions just didn't add up to someone who was fully awake.

"Oh, Potter..." suddenly continued Ginny with her next jaunty refrain. Draco gave a little gasp as the red-haired girl sang it. It was almost as if hearing her say Harry's surname scared him for some reason. Excellent.

"...you rotter, oh, what have you done..." Harry's choice of Peeves's infuriating personalized song seemed to make more colour drain from Malfoy's already pasty pallor.

"...you're killing off students, you think it's good fun..."

"Stop it!" shouted Draco, clearly frightened, "I demand you show yourself at once!" he began addressing the air around him, as if doing so might somehow cause his invisible antagonist to reveal himself. Not yet.

"...Oh, Potter, much hotter your temper's become..."

The eyes of his audience were now approaching saucer size. But Harry wasn't taunting the three solely for his own purposes—he had a few ulterior motives in mind. He was trying to distract them from noticing his friends, as well as keep them from doing anything to Ginny. Normally, he would've removed the curse from her, but there was no way of knowing how she would react if he did. Most pointedly of all, Draco, Crabbe, and Goyle, whether indirectly or not, had each now shown themselves capable of committing murder. A highly dangerous and volatile tendency. There was no telling what Malfoy and his cronies would do if suddenly faced by several of their enemies. Unlike the Hufflepuffs, Ravenclaws, and Gryffindors, this trio had hard started to play "for keeps." But Harry would sell his soul to Voldemort himself before he allowed the three of them to hurt anyone ever again.

“...in league with the Dark Lord, nix sooks one by one.” Harry had to hand it to Peeves, he thought, as he finished his odd little twist of song. Never once would Harry have guessed he’d be grateful for that stupid and obnoxious tune.

“How dare you call me that!” Malfoy cried, incensed. He strode purposefully toward Ginny and aimed his wand at her in a flash. “I am not a sook!” This was the moment Harry had been waiting for. He watched anticipantly as Draco neared the red-head and just as it looked like he was going to strike her—

Her eyes snapped open, and she clamped down on Malfoy’s wand wrist in her left hand. As it was much easier to coax Ginny into doing the actions if he were doing them himself, Harry was virtually copying everything he wanted the girl to do. Draco couldn’t have reacted more perfectly than if Harry had placed an Imperius Curse on him; when Ginny grabbed Malfoy’s wrist, he’d automatically tightened his grip and pulled closer to her, rather than jerking away. Coiling his hand into a hard fist and drawing his arm down, Harry yelled a triumphant “SURPRISE!” into the snivelling face just as his strong right uppercut connected squarely with Draco’s jaw. THWACK. Or just as he’d had Ginny do it, anyway.

She had hit Malfoy with enough force that he went flying into the air for a second and landed flat on his arse on the slime-coated floor. Hard. Yes! shouted Harry victoriously as his arch enemy bit the stone, pumping his still-clenched fist out in front of him. Once again, Ginny copy-catted him because the emotional intensity was too much to contain. And it didn’t matter to Harry that he’d lived the actions vicariously through somebody else. Hermione was right. That. Felt. Good. Harry made a mental note to himself one of the first things he had to do as soon as he got back was to personally give Malfoy a good punch in the head. Signed, sealed, and delivered.

Since it had been quite a while, Harry decided to talk to Ginny again. (())Still with me?(()) :Yeah, I was beginning to wonder. What happened: came the immediate reply. He bemusedly pondered how best to explain and said simply (())Well, we just gave Draco the ol’ one-two, and he’s out on the floor.(()) :Awwww, I wanna see: Ginny

complained. And so, he let her. Somehow, since Ginny's eyes were opened, she saw her point of view, only through Harry's eyes. He heard her twinkling amusement again. It was the weirdest sensation, experiencing this double-triple vision through their mental cross-links and thought patterns. It made Harry almost dizzy. And he'd once thought that wearing bifocals was the strangest visual peculiarity.

"Are so a sook," Ginny rejoined, and cackled at Malfoy's prone form. Harry hardly had to do a thing to get her to say it. The laughter echoed in the vast chamber, but it sounded like two people laughing, not just one. A young man and a young woman. Woah, freaky but wicked.

But enough fooling around. It was high-time for Harry to reveal himself. Still not having figured out how to make his hair shorter, he decided to work with it instead. He pulled out the end of his queue, took his glasses off, and shook his hair out. There was no way on earth he'd have braided hair in front of Malfoy. Then he went and marched straight over to where Draco was. The blonde was coming around with the aid of his two friends, as they were bent over him on the floor.

The three had the decency to look even more scared as Harry had Ginny sing aloud, "Happy Death-day to you ..."

Harry concentrated on drawing in all his dispersal, so that he could make himself be seen. As a means for intent, he slowly closed his hand around his glasses in front of him, shutting his eyes and using that ingrained part of his identity as a metaphysical focal point. Wantittohappen... wantittohappen...automatically his mantra began.

"... Happy Death-day to you..."

Unconsciously, he'd decided the easiest way to go about this was from the ground up, starting with his feet and up to his head. And so he did. ...wantittohappen...wantittohappen...

"...Happy Death-day dear Slytherins..."

His nemeses on the floor were beginning to look terrified as they watched Harry's gradual reappearance. Clearly they had no idea what was going on yet, but they began to draw back a bit anyway, half-dragging Draco with them in the process. And the whole reason Harry was able to see this happening despite the fact his eyes were closed was because of his atypical mental connection with Ginny. Wantittohappen!

"...Happy Death-day to you."

As the song drew to a close, it was quite obvious that Malfoy was fully awake now, and he and his cronies were staring Harry directly in the eyes. But for one wild moment, they still didn't know who he was. "Sirius Black?" shouted Malfoy in a fit of utter confusion. Harry laughed outright at this, sounding a bit manic. It must be the hair. The Slytherins on the floor were sputtering now, but this was nothing in comparison to the fear they would feel after finding out they were staring at the spirit of the very person they'd decided to try and kill a mere two weeks ago.

Slipping his glasses on, Harry tucked a bit of hair behind one ear, intentionally exposing his scar.

"No!" Malfoy shrieked in pure terror. "It can't be you, we came here to see, to watch you..." he trailed off in a croaking whisper.

"To watch me die?" finished Harry bitterly. "Yes, I know. You'll find there's precious little I don't know anymore."

Malfoy's voice was gaining slightly in strength and he said, "Don't tell me you're the one who put the Imperius Curse on the Weasley girl—"

"Her name—" Harry cut him off frigidly and drew forward, "is Ginny." He stared into Malfoy's eyes and said, "And I won't tell you. She can tell you."

"Harry's more powerful dead than alive," sing-songed Ginny from behind Harry's right shoulder. Draco's eyes widened again.

The Slytherins picked themselves carefully up off the floor and Malfoy said with fear still in his voice, "Okay. You can do the Imperius then. Impressive." It was obvious he still thought he might walk away. This guy really took the cake.

"You pathetic charlatan," sneered Harry, "as usual, you're narrow-minded egotism is causing you to completely miss the point."

"What are you talking about?" cast-about Malfoy, still trying not to be scared and failing.

"Oh, come now." Harry mocked him in a condescending manner, "You mean to say your master never told you the real reason he couldn't kill me?" The three started backing away from him. He allowed it. "No, I suppose not," Harry answered his own question. His eyes flashed and he said, "So I'll let you in on a little secret. It's because, even in death, he was afraid I'd overthrow him." Retreating still more, his three enemies now gained looks of disbelief on their faces.

"And you know what?" went on Harry. "Your master was right."

Dear Readers,

First of all I would like to thank everybody who reviewed...all the new readers...wow! I also apologise for taking so long in writing this chapter. It was so very hard and draining on me. Those whom I spoke with know precisely why, so I won't go into too much detail about it...for fear of giving too much away before you read.

I wanted this chapter to be true to our hero...so I agonised just over how he would react to the situation presented. I tried writing it in three different ways; the first one being mostly clueless Harry—not really knowing much; second how Jo would write him—alluding to some strong emotions but not really explaining much; and three—in more detail, so you would know why he was doing things, exactly what he was thinking, going through...and why. Except if he didn't know why himself.

Rest assured I have had extensive discussions over this, and it wasn't taken lightly...just know that Harry isn't crazy, he's not evil, he's just...had it up to here with it all.

Also, Harry now has a crux of things he hasn't had before this point: opportunity, means, and almost nothing to lose. And a man with nothing to lose is a highly dangerous thing. It changes your whole viewpoint on life...and Harry's life was already hard enough to begin with. Enough explaining. I hope you enjoy. Rae :D

BREKBBREKBBREKBBREKBBREKBBREKBBREKBBREKBBREK
BREAK

Harry didn't know exactly where these strong words came from. He only knew that he had to say them, or suffer some kind of as-yet unnameable consequences. Having come face to face with his own mortality seemed to have brought on a mantle of existential clarity that likely would've proven impossible otherwise. It was definitely not in Harry's nature to remonstrate people, but these circumstances were indeed extraordinary. After all, how often did a victim get a chance to come back and face his own murderers? Draco had best prepare for the tongue lashing of his life, for they sure had a lot of ground to cover. And Harry Potter was a man unleashed.

Draco stopped his withdrawal and said defiantly, "Do you honestly expect us to—"

"I expect you to sit still and shut the bloody hell up!" Harry cut him off furiously. "Your mouth was always going to get you into a lot of trouble someday, Malfoy, and guess what? Today's your unlucky day!" Up to that moment, even Harry himself hadn't known just how unlucky Malfoy was. For Harry shocked the four of them with what he did next. He had, quite wandlessly, mentally directed a double-spell of immobilising curse and silencing jinx straight at the trio, effectively rendering them each still and quiet instantly.

However, Harry recovered admirably; even while trying to figure out how the hell he'd done what he just did, why he hadn't been able to accomplish it sooner—or better yet, if he could repeat the act. He wouldn't give Malfoy the satisfaction of seeing him hesitate or act surprised, regardless.

Shaking it off, Harry strode forward confidently to the petrified threesome and said, "For once in your miserable lives, you will let me do all of the talking. And listen up, because I sure won't be repeating myself for the likes of you ignorant gits," said Harry disdainfully. It wasn't like him to call names, but this group sure had it a long time in coming. They deserved to be called every dirty epithet in existence, but Harry had more class than that. Instead he contented himself with the simpler terms at the moment. "Now, where were we?" Harry continued lightly. "Ah, yes. Taking over."

"But how is that possible, by someone who can't even state his own name? I'm sure you're wondering."

Harry was currently referring to his physical state, not his spiritual, and that was more than clear to Draco. Even though Harry addressed the three of them, his comments were decidedly aimed at Malfoy.

The blonde was trying his very best to still appear defiant and refused to even look at Harry. And Harry allowed that too, because it would only be too soon that little error of Malfoy's would get corrected.

Clasping his hands behind his back, Harry began taking measuring steps around the three in a calculative circle. "The answer to that, although complex and not readily apparent, is actually quite simple in retrospect."

"Vol-de-mort," Harry grated, dragging out enunciation of each syllable as his enemies winced silently and drew in air through their nostrils, "learned from the time before I was born that I might be a bit of a 'problem' for him. But since the first time we met, he managed to botch up our encounters. Didn't quite manage to kill me, you see, despite the fact I was merely a toddler." Unaware of how very Marauder he looked, Harry smirked and continued acerbically, "But he did, however, transfer some of his powers directly to me. And for better or worse, our connection was forged," Harry tapped his scar meaningfully. Draco shut his eyes in response and refused to open them, so Harry got right up in his face and hissed menacingly, "The connection that allows me to do this."

Then he curled his lip and commenced to swear at Draco, chaining together about a dozen of the most cutting oaths he could think of on the spot. In Parseltongue. As death rites had a way of expanding one's vocabulary, they were quite choice terms, all right. There was something indescribably satisfying about the way Malfoy's face burned and contorted with indignation, despite the fact he couldn't possibly understand the literal meaning of what was said to him. Harry's intent was crystal clear; pay attention or else. Since he was the son of wizardrealm aristocrats, Draco Malfoy understood better than most others Harry's combination of cursing with a forbidden language considered dirty in the extreme produces verbal invective to the infinite power. The physical equivalent was like trying to make someone bleed to death through paper cuts—painful and humiliating. And Draco had to stand there and take every bit of it.

The insufferable Slytherin began shuddering under the onslaught, but whether it was from fear or fury, Harry didn't know. Nor did he care much.

"But as your dear master came to discover," snorted Harry, "I'm not that easy to kill." He raised an eyebrow, folded his arms, and resumed his pacing. "Five times he tried, and five times he failed."

Harry's eyebrows knitted together and he considered, "But like a shoddy amateur marksman, he kept missing the target!" Harry laughed incredulously, still a bit mystified out of the seeming impossibility of it all.

Then he sensed more than saw his friends starting to awaken. Wondering how he was able to tell this, he realised that he also could feel a second, stronger undercurrent of something flowing within his mortal body. It was almost as if his righteous anger was infusing the environment around them with a humming energy; an energy that even filled in the gaps of his knowledge, as he could now also seemingly pluck thoughts out of the air when he needed to. After all, at the start of their arrival, he had not known why the three Slytherins were there, yet almost as soon as he'd started to address them the answers came to him. Even though highly unlikely to gain access to the event by Voldemort, the trio had simply come to gloat over Harry's soon-to-be dead body. How predictably and disgustingly...vain.

"The fifth and final time, Voldemort finally discovered why it was the worst possible idea to kill me anyway." Narrowing his eyes, Harry forced himself to relive the Voldemort's possessing of his body, so he could bring those most excruciating sensations—emotional and physical—to the forefront. And except for a grinding in his jaw and tensing of his spine, he kept his stance carefully impassive; regardless of the fact his feelings of loss and wanting to die at that time had been the worst he'd experienced in his whole living life. For a full two minutes, Harry didn't even blink.

Losing a bit of stoicism, he looked at the floor, subdued, and continued, "The...less bad... part of his own soul..." it floored Harry to say this aloud, "...was right in here," and he placed a hand to his forehead. "Here...all along...since the night he murdered my parents..." he looked askance at the three frozen ones beside him, "...it's why Voldemort couldn't stand to be in my presence. Because I was a constant reminder to him of anything remotely good that he'd wanted to cast out of his own self."

Harry bit his lower lip hard in concentration, as these details were less forthcoming to him, "He thought he'd figured out how to defeat

that by using my blood during his...rebirth the year before...but getting rid of me would've meant suicide, so he'd inadvertently created his own worst paradox of principles. Kill all who oppose him and more than likely lose his life, or let that hated reminder—me—continue to live, however reluctantly." Stunned, Harry just stood there for a bit, recalling the prophecy that was finally given him, ...neither can live while the other survives...

A corner of Harry's mouth quirked and he said grimly, "Luckily for me, Voldemort's sense of self-preservation went on automatic." It was filling Harry with a strange combination of fear and relief that he finally was coming to know the details behind...everything. He was even starting to understand why people had kept it secret from him for such a long time. But he still had other things to deal with first. So Harry added acidly, "At least until he'd find himself a way around his little 'problem' again."

He could now sense that his friends were all right, if a bit dazed, as they continued to awaken. And Ginny was also there...as a silent observer but he'd effectively blocked that bond so he could concentrate more fully on gathering the information he needed. The more he talked, the more that energy inside him surged; it was almost as if he could now see a radiative essence surrounding everybody and everything. Even the dank stone itself seemed to start thrumming with this natural phosphorescence of feeling that was evidently rolling off him at present.

"So, soundly defeated from his battle in the Department of Mysteries, a weakened Voldemort was looking for any means possible to get rid of me without having to do so himself. That's where you came in," Harry's voiced dripped with revulsion as he personally addressed Malfoy again. "Or weren't you aware that it was your Dark Lord's idea that you come to him?" Harry questioned patronizingly. He continued in the same tone, "Oh, granted it was your petty hatred that drove you to plan framing me for murder, but it was picked up on by Mr. Evil straightaway. Keep tabs on me, he does...this Voldemort."

Smiling dourly now, Harry said, "But you obviously hadn't counted on our connection alerting him or me that something was up." Shaking his head, he went on, "The night of the crash, I felt his anger...and I'd

assumed it was because his 'Death Eaters' couldn't find me. But apparently, it was because I'd managed to fade from view without a trace. Baaaad move, Malfoy," Harry nodded, chuckling now. Draco's face tensed in discomfiture. It was this event that had most displeased Lord Voldemort, which had caused Malfoy to be punished by him, Harry now knew.

Quickly sloughing amusement, Harry continued, "So now you learn that you, just like everybody else whom he comes in contact with, are a pawn. Expendible. To be used and thrown away."

"But that still doesn't change the fact that you were ultimately responsible. You were the ones who instigated the sequence of events which allowed Voldemort to get to me; put me in a position where I was most vulnerable." Harry growled, "You couldn't even have the decency to face me straight on! You filthy cowards had to wait until I was in a coma! A coma that was caused by injuries that you inflicted!" At this shouted statement Harry began shaking with barely-repressed anger at the marring, and he also felt the thriving energy source around him start to grow and shift. It was as if the light in him and the walls and floor were being shared now. Even the stone looked like it was flickering with a charge. The hum that began as Harry started this encounter was also becoming audible to the others. The Slytherins darted looks about wildly, as if trying to locate the source of the sound.

"And as a result of your actions, other people tried to help me. So therefore, you hurt them too," Harry's face twisted with the remembered pain for his comrades. He was only now just starting to realise what the Healer Adonna had gone through to help him as well. It wasn't quite how Ginny said; Madam hadn't "nearly gone mad with fury" when the bond between the two of them was severed by Voldemort, she had nearly gone mad. Period. Then Harry whispered, "This one's for Madam Adonna," as he, quite consciously, released a psychic salvo of power directly at the party of three. As the immobiliser curse was quite superfluous now, he released them from it and they held their heads in their hands but didn't yet fall to the floor.

Not trusting himself to address his friends in his current state of turmoil, he instead turned to their huddled forms in the shadows and

held a hand up to them; a signal to stay put. Thankfully, they took the cue... but he could feel it was largely out of fear. That couldn't be helped at the moment.

Harry turned back to the three in front of him. "And the others you caused pain to..." he squeezed his eyes tight for half a second, "this one's for Fred and George." Again, the Slytherins fought the punishment he sent them...fading closer to the floor, fading with the pain they so deserved...but soundlessly as they were still voiceless. Then he remembered Ron and Hermione in the graveyard...poor Hermione, who was grief-stricken to the point of not speaking to hardly anyone...and new friend Ginny, who had selflessly volunteered herself for him, "...and this one's for my best friends," he stated sadly, and again pointedly aimed a hot sword of power with the energy that was his right.

The guilty party was fully prostrate now, on the floor and writhing in pain from his earned wrath. Harry strode closer to them and drew in a deep breath, determined not to let them see his tears. They had already received too much consideration from him already. For this was definitely not something he was enjoying, that was for sure and certain. But...it had to be done. It was the only way to make sure they understood this was something they could never get away with again. Unfortunately, people like them just didn't understand anything else.

Sensing the trauma from his friends nearby, Harry also determined he needed to do something to hopefully keep their faith in him. They didn't understand why he was doing what he was doing; he could tell as he drew their feelings into his mind. "Please," he finally spoke to them softly, "catch Ginny, I'm releasing the curse from her now." Dean and Neville, faces ashen, came forward tentatively and positioned themselves next to the red-haired girl as Harry dissolved the connection between him and her. To her credit, and Harry's great relief, she'd only slightly slumped against Dean before starting to recover.

Harry walked over to Malfoy, stood over him, and addressed the blonde. "The inflicted silence is so you know, firsthand, something of what it's like to be dead. Nobody can hear you talk, nobody can hear you scream, nobody can hear you cry. Nobody can hear you do one

damned bit of anything. And they can't talk to you, either. One of the 'gifts' you so inconsiderately bestowed upon me," he confirmed dispassionately, and stung them a bit more with power.

"Ten days!" choked out Harry devastatingly, nearly sobbing in remembrance. "You made me—made US—feel this way, and I let you feel it for less than ten minutes!" he raged to them, at the top of his voice. Vaguely, through his pain-haze, Harry started to realise this was hurting him as much as his enemies. Enough was enough. With a last fighting grah! he released them from his blitz. And then Harry did something else that shocked him no end. He actually took pity on his own executioners.

"Now I'll give you the one courtesy you failed to give me. A chance. The opportunity to see your challenger face to face." He waited a few moments and said harshly, "Get up." The three stiffly picked themselves up off the stone, casting frightened sidelong glances at him. "Look at me," Harry commanded in the same tone. They did.

"And just to show how unlike you I am, I also offer you a choice," he gestured behind him to the elevator in the distance, and removed the silencer jinx from them simultaneously. "You can either face me, or run away with your cowardice fully intact. It's completely up to you."

Swallowing audibly, Draco raged at him in a whisper, "Go to hell."

Harry's eye twitched as he answered flatly, "Already been there, no thanks to you. Didn't much care for the company." Harry had no idea whether this was actually true or not, but it was worth it just to shut Malfoy up with a pointed comment again. Plus the Fright Bus had sure seemed like hell.

"Ten seconds," Harry redirected his enemies to the elevator. "Which is more than you lot deserve," he said coldly. Suddenly the elevator's doors snapped open. Still his nemeses didn't seem to understand.

"Ten..." began Harry.

The three wasted no more time and started beating their retreat.

“Nine...” the walls started to flicker again with Harry’s energy.

“Eight...seven...six...” the convection was spinning around anything and everything...Harry couldn’t see that he was starting to glow as he was filled with the gathering of this power...

“Five...four...three...” Draco and the others had nearly reached the elevator, but it looked as if they weren’t going to make it. Harry and the environment started to strobe as the summoning of his power grew to a fever pitch. The air around them crackled with unspent magic. One could almost taste it, so powerful were the currents filling the air...he reached out a glowing hand toward the three...

“...two...one.”

Dear Readers,

First, I would like to give a great big shout out ta all ya'll o' mah new homies (students at a certain middle school) in sunny California! Hi, and welcome to the wonderful world of fan fiction! Just to let you know, if you wish to create an account with just go to the homepage and register. The only things you need are a user ID and a valid email address...oh yeah, and your parents' permission. You don't have to be a writer to have an account. You don't even have to be a member to leave a review. Let me just remind you no fanfic writer gets paid for their work; they tend to write for the sheer joy of it, and the only way they know they're reaching people is if you leave reviews! It's also the only way they get paid...and most writers tend to write faster the more reviews you leave! Don't be shy! If you have something you wish to say, let me know!

That said, I hope you like this next chapter...I warn you though, it's very, very scary. Read at your own risk! XD

I also wish to give big, huge, acknowledgments to my friends gabby, siri, Director, and wizened from Mugglenet for helping me out with terminology and inspiration for this and the last two chapters. Quite honestly I couldn't have done the thing right without you, thanks so much for putting up with me. And to anyone else who gave me fabulous music and recommendations, KNOW THAT I LURVE YOU FOR IT! LOVE, RAE :D

BREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAK

"Never mess with Harry!" roared Harry as the elevator doors slammed shut on the retreating trio. Even his eyes looked like they were shooting emerald sparks, so infused was he with bolts of magical power.

"Harry?" questioned a timid voice. His friends had come up behind him during the countdown; he should've known they'd do something like that. He cursed worriedly under his breath "Shit!" He couldn't hold onto this force much longer!

“GET DOWN! NOW!” Harry hollered, louder still, as he spun about and faced the opposite direction. Simultaneously checking to make sure his friends had hit the floor and his aim was true, he brought up his other hand and let loose the burst of apocalyptic charge that had built within him.

Two cosmic jets streamed forth from his arms and struck the chamber’s access plate with a resounding CLANG! Within three seconds, the metal door had collected enough power to flare white-hot, and an answering feedback started travelling back toward Harry along the energetic lines. Shuddering convulsively, he warred with it, yelling and screaming at the thing to go back toward the door; he even had to bury his head into his figurative shoulder, for all the good it did. Not knowing whether it would matter, Harry let go the last of his power and covered his face in his arms. It was an automatic reaction; but it was probably a good thing he did it. This energy seemed to cut across all time and space as the reverberating explosion that filled the antechamber drove him backward a good ten metres.

Having mentally dug in his heels, Harry “skidded” to a stop, kept his stance, and opened his eyes. Even through the debris and smoke, he could see the twisted remains of the snake-décored chamber cover. It had flown off its hinges and cracked the wall in front of it, to ricochet and come to a stop not far from where his friends had once stood in the shadows. Hmm... perhaps it had been a good thing the group had moved after all. The safest place for them would’ve been near the focal point of all that power....

“Ha ha ha,” a knackered high-pitched chuckle escaped Harry, who had been drained to the point of craziness, “Wooo! So much for Parseltongue.” Then he collapsed bonelessly to the floor into a ghostly heap.

Harry wasn’t sure how much time he’d lost after passing out, but he knew it couldn’t have been much. When he came to, his friends were standing over him, faces full of consternation over the fact they could do nothing whatsoever to help him. Thankfully, except for the one lightning burst while he’d tried to exact the Imperius Curse, he hadn’t felt anything remotely physically painful...just...sheer debilitating exhaustion. At the moment, he felt so weak he couldn’t even speak to

his friends. Evidently he should've let go of that energy just a titch sooner...it may have helped him stay upright, at least.

Right now, he just wished his friends would leave him be; all he needed was a little sleep...sleep...sleep? How long had it been since Harry actually had a real rest? He'd been wandering around aimlessly for ten days or more, having nowhere to return to...not knowing who was whom, which way was up or down....

The surrounding group were now frantically trying to get his attention for something...he crankily told them all just to leave him alone, rolled over, and feebly attempted to push Neville's arm away...and...succeeded? What the hell? Harry hardly had to give a second thought to spectral manipulation anymore. That alone penetrated his exhaustion in a way nothing else could have.

Struggling now and throwing his hair away from his eyes, he pushed himself to his feet for the second time that night, and saw precisely what it was all his friends were raving about. They had good reason to be shouting; that was certain. Apparently, while he had been out, several dementors had positioned themselves in front of the now-permanently open access way to the chamber. From his previous thought-gathering activities, Harry had known the dark beings were in the sealed room. However, he hadn't counted on passing out, and had no time to warn present company.

Standing there with his petrified friends, Harry expected the requisite cold, or at least the numbing all-over fear to start eating away at his consciousness again. But it didn't come. The dementors also failed to rush the whole of them, seemingly content to hover in front of their doorway.

As he stared, Harry felt something brush the back of his mind. It was so subtle at first, that he'd assumed somebody had accidentally touched him, but how could that be the case? He was still a ghost. Out of curiosity, Harry reached out to the thin threads that were in his mind. The gathering of thoughts opened itself to him...it sounded as a chamber orchestra; a psychic melody...so melancholy, and yet so indescribably beautiful. It sang to him of love lost and found, friends departed and reunited, sound defeat yet glorious victory in war....

Harry felt his jaw drop as he realised it was coming from the direction of the dementors. The one that was straight in front...it even began to address him personally. It wasn't like a real voice, or resembling anything else Harry had ever heard in his life. What to anybody else would have been a disgusting or even frightening noise, he instead listened to all it had to say, drinking of the selfless outpouring it seemed happy to give. It was even better than all of those things Harry had felt through the music; this wonderful dementor was promising him a much-deserved rest. Finally...at long last, somebody who understood he just needed to sleep. He told it how tired he was, how sick of fighting, how sick of everybody telling him what he should and shouldn't do, how he just...wanted to shove off for a while. And it understood him! This beautiful, empathetic creature understood everything. How could Harry have ever been afraid of something so compassionate as this dementor?

It reached out to him and he came forward to follow it and finally get the promised sleep his weary, soul-sick spirit had needed for so long.

Before it could touch him, Harry was assailed by a blinding white light; one that had been far brighter than the power he had just used to blast the chamber door open. He distantly heard an outside voice yell, "Suck this! Expecto Patronum!" as the celestial brightness repeated itself a second time, and added to the first.

Almost immediately began a shrieking, tearing noise in the back of his head. This light was hurting the dementor! Its mental scream was starting to shred into his thoughts.... Harry wanted to turn around and tell the people to stop it, to leave the dementors alone, how the poor creatures were only trying to help him, but he found he couldn't move. As sure as an immobiliser curse had been used on him, Harry was frozen in his current position and unable to shift a single inch.

"Expecto Patronum!"

The flare of light again rejoined its companions and the dementors' screams became louder. This warm light was somehow blocking the effects of the screaming from his mind now, however. Looking down, he also noticed something else that shocked and terrified him. Of all

the things Harry had experienced, even as of late, not one was even half as horrifying as what he now witnessed was happening to his very spirit.

The place on his arm where the glass-shard scar was had been exposed because his up-reaching arm's sleeve had fallen back from it. Now the scar had sunk clean into his skin, turned black and was overtaking the rest of his hand as he watched. Only, his hand wasn't looking much like a hand anymore; so much as resembling a rotting, decrepit, drab-tinged claw. NO! cried Harry under the assault, but not a sound escaped him. He was trapped in his own mind, unable to convey his desperate plea for help.

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!"

The light around he and his friends grew still brighter, and Harry could feel the dementors' lock on him lessen a little. But it still pulled inexorably. It was going to hurt if something wrenched your soul out of you, through your mouth or by a curse, or any other means. Evidently, if one failed to have a body to house their spirit, it didn't hurt to be exposed to a dementor; dementors communicated with spirit and body on different levels. Harry hadn't even seen it coming; the evil things had known how very weary he was and had been waiting for his inevitable return to his body. That was why they had been so patient in front of the door; the dementors had been counting on this, expecting him. They wanted him. And his now-defenceless soul had been seduced by the siren call of death...lest Dark One's minions will make him their member...the poem had told all...but this was worse than death. More terrible still, Harry had no means to stop it.

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!" shouted a fifth and final voice.

This appeared to have done what the other spells had failed to thus far. As the screaming in the back of his mind became less than a dull roar, Harry watched as the dementors began to shrink in size and were overcome with the unquenchable light surrounding them all. Then, for the second time in less than five minutes, the antechamber was rocked with an explosion. The combined effect of five Patronus Charms had built to such a crescendo; the resultant achievement was

a sonic boom of epic proportions that drove he and his friends to their knees.

Gratefully, this chamber seemed to have been built along much sturdier lines than the old one, or at least had some regular upkeep of a sort. Though debris rained down on them all, the structure still held well, surprisingly enough.

Harry came to realise the dementors were gone and he was free from their imprisonment. His ghostly visage no longer bore the resemblance akin to the dark soulless animals. But it still left a sort of aching void in the back of his mind where the threads once were.

Slightly dazed yet amazed, Harry said softly, "You killed it..." but the words came out wrong; they sounded accusatory instead of thankful. So, a few of his friends let him know in a very blunt manner precisely what they thought of his ingratitude.

"Yeah, well, getting on with a dementor isn't exactly what I'd call a healthy past-time, Harry!" lashed Ginny, angrily. Her whole attitude was completely devoid of any hint of amusement. She was wide-eyed and shaking; it was obvious she was on the verge of tears. And she wasn't the only one. After their latest ordeal, he could hear everyone was breathing hard as if they had run a marathon whilst trying to suppress sobs which were threatening to come out of them. And this was definitely not a group to give over to this type of emotional display. It's said to be almost unbearable to witness...Snape's words about administration of dementor's Kisses skimmed across Harry's mind.

Neville said breathlessly, "I think he was actually trying to waltz with it..." it was obvious that Longbottom was horrified, too. Harry knew he should say something, but as the realisation of all that had happened washed over him, his ability for conversation was muted. What could you possibly say to a group of people who had so selflessly brought you back from the brink? For once, Harry had been utterly incapable of protecting or defending himself, and it was against the worst thing anyone could possibly imagine...staring death in the face, and not being able to run away. Each of them had accepted the challenge and crushed it for him instead. "Gee thanks, spot you later" and "oops,

sorry about that” just didn’t seem to cut it. Rather, Harry just said the first random thought that came to his mind.

“But I hate dancing,” Harry protested, his nose wrinkling in distaste.

A sound somewhere between weeping and giggling burst from Susan’s throat and she held a hand up to her mouth. It made Harry smile and answer in kind as he turned around to face his friends, they all joined together in a fit of profoundly relieved, if a tad mental laughter. This was definitely a situation of laugh or cry, and everyone present seemed to have subconsciously agreed on a little of both. Although irrevocably changed, their friend was back once more, and it was entirely because of their own grace under fire.

The changes within him were something Harry would never have cause to share; it just wouldn’t do to try and explain to them he’d actually momentarily felt sorry for a dementor. That was a type of Stockholm Syndrome nobody should be privy to, and one which Harry hoped they would never have the misfortune to understand. Now those were cheery thoughts.

“Out of curiosity, what were you guys thinking of when you performed your charms?” That was an astounding bit of magic he had just witnessed—and ironically from what was arguably the most important spell which they had learned from him in the D.A. This was also the self-same charm which Harry himself should’ve supposedly been unable to do at his age; it pleased him to know that he could actually pass on that skill. And just like any true teacher, he wanted to know precisely what had inspired his students.

They all smiled hugely and exchanged looks, whilst Ginny turned to him again and stated, “We used the same thoughts for this that we’d used for the séance summoning. It made perfect sense to do it. Each of our best thoughts of you had one thing in common—you being alive. Cheers to happy memories, Harry,” she ended, and inclined her head toward him, as if in acknowledgment of his superior instruction. Talk about satirical.

Harry stood there, zoning about a bit once more with his thoughts and soaking up the positive residual energy left from his friends’ charms.

Two of the group had decided to warily enter the chamber, after having asked him if there was anymore dementors lurking about. That was something he'd definitely be able to tell now, and thankfully the answer was a resounding no. The Patronuses had, without question, done away with them all. Harry just hadn't been able to bring himself to go into that chamber yet; he knew exactly what his friends were going to come across, and he was pushing off the inevitable as long as possible.

He and his other friends heard another ding! come from the direction of the elevator, and at the same time Dean and Luna had come sprinting back out of the main chamber. Next, Harry heard the exact same comment said with the exact same incredulity from opposite sides of the antechamber.

"Dear lord, it's Harry!" Dean and Professor Lupin whispered disbelievingly at the same time.

The Order of the Phoenix had just shown up.

Dear Readers,

I can unequivocally state this was the most difficult chapter for this story I have ever written. That's saying something because there have been a load of very deep chapters thus far—the last one of which Harry was nearly overcome by dementors.

I have attempted to write this chapter in such a way that it would be descriptive and yet sensitive to the PG-13/T rating at which my story is tagged with. If you, at anytime feel uncomfortable with what you're reading, please stop and send me an email to let me know where you needed to leave off, and I shall either change the story, or give you the rest of the information you need for the following chapters. It depends on how many responses I get. I can't know unless you tell me, either way.

This is a very, very difficult chapter thus far, as it is almost purely narration. So many things become revealed and fall into place. If you haven't noticed, when something bad happens, I nearly always chase it up with something good. Bah, I'm sounding morbid. Please read, and enjoy. Rae.

BREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAK

It probably would have been more accurate to say that part of the Order of the Phoenix was now present; Professor Snape, Tonks, and Professor Dumbledore were there with Lupin. Moody and Kingsley had apparently volunteered to take a very terrified, if very complacent Crabbe and Goyle back to the Ministry for...debriefing of a sort. The pair had been found wandering around St. Mungo's waiting room, looking none too sure of their situation, and had basically given up under the most cursory of scrutiny by the members in the Order. Not surprisingly, Draco Malfoy had managed to make a hasty departure while leaving his companions behind to fend for themselves. It also explained how the Order had known precisely where to come—Crabbe and Goyle had quite happily volunteered the required information after having narrowly escaped Harry's little reign of terror for them.

What they had failed to realise was that Harry had never once planned on killing them in the first place. It wasn't that he hadn't experienced the feelings, or repeatedly entertained the idea in his mind; that would be a complete lie. He had been tempted, oh-so tempted, but several reasons had come to him for just why that would be the worst possible idea, not the least of which Harry would've earned the title of "murderer" the Ministry had seemed only too ready to give him.

The moments before he let the trio run away, Harry had found not a shred of true forgiveness within him for his enemies. This frightened him, so he determined to try and find the feeling through any other means; he forced himself to tap into the waves of pain he had been sending them. Astounded at the level of power this involved, it still hadn't given Harry enough reason to override the fact that these people deserved every bit of that which they were receiving. So, he had taken the one avenue left to him; Harry had reached out to his friends and their thoughts and feelings. And there it was—empathy, compassion, mercy.

Harry had almost felt shamed that he had narrowly overlooked the fact his friends were now playing the roles of innocent observers; a position Harry had found himself in constantly since the tender young age of fifteen months old. He refused, right then and there, to be the reason that anybody would gain the regrettable ability to see thestrals.

Despite every single thing the young Potter had been through thus far, despite the fact he had the means at his disposal to justifiably do away with those who had been responsible for his current position, he still cared about the effect of his actions on others. Harry wasn't a monster, regardless of how Voldemort or anyone else had tried to convince him or make him otherwise. Knowing full well which route the Slytherins would choose, Harry had still offered them a dignified choice, and his present companions were just coming to realise how much this truly attested to what type of individual he really was.

After getting over their initial shock of actually seeing Harry in spirit form, the adults gave all the rest of his friends a good once-over at his behest. They all looked quite a fright, after having fallen to the floor twice and faced dementors all in the same twenty minutes or so.

A few of them still couldn't shake off the cold and had been provided conjured blankets to remedy the dementor-induced affects.

Although rather surprising, Hagrid had shown up too. It was as if he had known just how desperately his presence would be needed.

Everybody had filed into the chamber and come to see exactly what Dean had meant by saying Harry was in there. He'd pointed out a figure in a far corner to them..

When Voldemort had severed the Gemini Stasis Charm between Madam Adonna and Harry, it had effectively split Harry in two; mortal half and spiritual half. It had very nearly done the same thing to the healer, but she had somehow picked up on the whole of what was going on, both inside and outside of their minds. Harry had not been given the luxury of that knowledge—not that he could've done much about it if he did, however.

Going purely on instinct, his superconscious, spiritual self had sensed something was horribly wrong, and somehow separated itself from his body. At the time of the severing Voldemort luckily had not known of this unobserved, yet highly crucial thwarting of his next action concerning Harry. The reason why the charm had been wrenched off in the first place was because he had wanted to whisk Harry away from hospital; with a bit of fancy time-turner planning, a decoy, as well as strategically placed assistance, this was pulled off without anyone being the wiser.

Until now. Initial reaction would have been to rush, but the group instead hung back, picking up on Harry's lead. Accepting he could put it off no longer, Harry carefully paced the way toward his body.

Voldemort had brought Harry's body to this chamber roughly ten days ago, to perform the dementor's Kiss and finally be rid of his archrival. This was a critical action, because if he could deprive Harry's body of spirit, Voldemort would at last be able to extract and crush that piece of his own soul that he'd been driving to get at for so long. A mindless, spiritless Harry Potter would be completely defenseless against the onslaught of such an exploit—physically and psychologically.

So sure was Lord Voldemort of his plans, he hadn't even bothered to check and see beforehand if all was going accordingly. For at the prescribed time of the dementors, Harry had, in true Potter fashion, done Voldemort the very great disservice of...not having a soul to suck.

This had enraged the evil man so much, that he had gone to greatest lengths to prevent the rejoining of Harry's body to his soul. Having been little more than a random collection of ions himself at one point, Voldemort had known Harry's spirit would be drawn toward anything remotely familiar to him. Unfortunately for Voldemort, the extent of his influence concerning Harry's soul stopped at sensing the fact it was still around, somewhere; or what havoc he could wreak on what was through Harry's physical mind.

At this point, all the group could see of Harry's body was from the back. He was half-twisted on his side, waist-length hair ratted into stringy mats covered in grime, fetid water, and whatever else the floor was coated with. One of his arms was thrown out toward the wall away from them, perhaps as if reaching for some unseen rescuer that had never come.

Although Lord Voldemort hardly had to convince the dementors to hang around in the chamber, the horrible plans he had put into motion included tormenting and aggravating those closest to Harry; any trusted Hogwarts staff, Remus Lupin, Fred and George, Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, Ron and Hermione—anyone whom was considered even a remote threat had been put on the watch list, and quietly manipulated from a distance. Even if it merely included the planting of artificial feelings of apathy, disbelief, or stoking of numbing indifference due to loss, Voldemort's influence had certainly taken its toll.

Again because of prideful negligence and underestimation of the power of Harry's influence on others, Lord Voldemort had failed to look outside Harry's tightest circle of friends. Not to mention Hedwig—Hedwig, bless her wonderful, magical heart, had been on the lookout—and came and found him, to draw Harry to the one place where he could find true help.

It wasn't exactly a mystery that soul and body are drawn together at the time of passing; Harry would have eventually been pulled toward that chamber, even if he couldn't gain access to the inside. The critical part of finding his friends was that Harry had needed assistance or guardianship of a sort. He was not his true self without his body, and had needed the constant safeguard that only his good friends could provide at that time. Evidently, blood protective factor was moot if you had no blood to protect you.

Suddenly, Harry threw a sharp look at Dumbledore, and the headmaster motioned everybody to halt their approach. Then the two of them quietly stepped around at a discreet distance so they were facing the group, facing the boy on the stone.

Another thing that Voldemort hadn't counted on, and only merely suspected, was that Harry's spirit could carry on without his body indefinitely. That was the most important thing Harry had discerned in the antechamber after trying to execute the Imperius Curse. He had not been kidding in the slightest when he'd told the three Slytherins that Voldemort had been terrified that Harry would be able to destroy him anyway, dead or not. With what one could only assume was instinct at work, Harry had become a creature of thought; he had been sustaining his vitality purely on the goodwill that others had for him. More astounding still, even when there wasn't any optimism to be found, Harry had somehow converted the energy to that which he needed, to keep "carrying on," as it were.

Positive thought was an endless reserve of nearly-untapped potential; one which Voldemort hadn't even one inkling about. And it was this, alone, which had helped Harry differentiate what in the world had been happening concerning him in the past two weeks. The psychiatric backlash that had filled the antechamber following his Imperius Curse attempt was energy of pure, unadulterated thought—thoughts from Voldemort's very mind.

Simply by learning what was there for the taking, Harry had become an aphysical superconductor and subconsciously transformed the very darkest of places—that horrible, dank antechamber—into a haven of sorts, and all with the informational thought fields he had seemingly plucked from the air surrounding him at the time. So Ginny

had been right, but not in the way she had originally assumed. Harry had indeed, used Lord Voldemort's own powers against him in effort to bring himself back.

Despite the fact everything Harry had been experiencing the last two weeks had been nearly intolerable, except for that one terrifying dementor run-in, he had still been spared the brunt of Voldemort's latest round of armageddon against him. Regrettably, as everybody could now see, Harry's physical body had not been nearly as fortunate.

A seldom talked about fact in the wizard world was that one's body could still technically exist without its spirit. It was also a well-established fact that anybody who did so would be classified as little more than living dead, or at least better off dead. Either way, they wouldn't long have to deal with it—the longest known time span anybody had ever managed to live without their spirit was seven days, maybe a little less. Even this would have been a welcome respite compared to the constant torture Harry's mind had been subjected to as of late. Most people would have given up long before, but Harry Potter wasn't most people. Through some horrible twist of fate, his soul-raped body had still retained an otherwise enviable modicum of self-awareness.

It wasn't bad enough that Harry had been bereft of spirit; it wasn't bad enough that Lord Voldemort had starved him of anything remotely humane—no. Voldemort had caused Harry not only to relive his worst past memories repeatedly, but had created new horrors for him to deal with as well. Even though Harry's soul had taken leave, there was still grey matter in that head of his, too. This, combined with that small piece of Voldemort's consciousness, had allowed the snake-eyed man carte blanche havoc on what little was left of Harry's mind. Nightmare scenario after nightmare scenario had been hard-pressed through Harry's brain, only to be perpetuated on a feedback loop by the presence of at least a half-dozen dementors.

Without the temperance and rationality of his soul, Harry's mind had reverted back to all things primal as a last means of defence. For the endless duration of ten days, his poor soulless body had been left to its own devices. The first three days or so had been filled with nothing

but Harry screaming like an animal at the dementors, attempting to fight them off and drive them away. He hadn't even had the ability of language conjugation, as that appeared to be yet another function of spirit he lacked. Harry had literally roared himself hoarse.

Then came the tears. Torrents of tears had been forced out of Harry because of the waves of despair Lord Voldemort had caused in the young man's psyche. Harry hadn't even had the relief of being able to sleep or fully withdraw, because anytime he tried there was Voldemort, staring back at him from the void. Even nightmares would have been better than this horrid, dreamless state—normal REM sleep of any type helped to keep everyone lucid. It was yet another otherwise overlooked utility Harry had been stripped of by the heartless Voldemort.

Finally, after so long with nothing concrete to fight against, Harry's pitiable, spiritless body had turned on and attacked the only thing left to him—himself. Whether as a means of punishment or out of fear, or both, he had started tearing his raven locks of hair out in patches during fits of craziness. The glass-shard scar on Harry's arm hadn't even been given a chance to fully heal before he was brought to the chamber, and it had been ripped open by its bearer multiple times. A fresher, newer mirror of it had been created on the opposite arm as well. The thin shirt and trousers Harry had been dressed in before his arrival here now hung in tatters, after having been clawed at and pulled on by their wearer.

And yet, most phenomenally, Harry's dreamless, soulless, completely deprived self had managed to, against all hope or odds, cling tenaciously to what was left of his life. It was also this end result that Harry and his companions had most unfortunately come across in the chamber.

Now walking toward what was originally mistaken for a pile of rags, Professor Lupin cautiously approached the completely still form of Harry on the floor. Streaks of scarlet marked the surrounding stone, making manifest the places where Harry had curled up or collapsed in recent days, when he'd been able to move at all. Scarcely dried rivulets of blood stood out on the young man's arms and clothing, and long-since dried tear stains had also left salty tracts all over his face.

The greyness of the granite reflected off what small bit of his colourless skin had been left unmarred, and his eyes, normally a fiery emerald, had been tinged with a sickly shade of yellow and stared out sightlessly at the wall. He had also lost weight, as evidenced by the prominent taughtness of his sallow cheekbones and sunken eyesockets. Not a sound was uttered from his parted, cracked lips. In every sense of the word, Harry looked dead; and by all rights, he should have been.

“Are we too late? Is he...?” questioned Lupin at large, grimly yet determinedly.

Despite the fact the former professor obviously wanted to help, he still sensed a need to keep his distance, intuitively. Everybody else had been driven to silence at the sight of what had been left of Harry. They all looked on with widest eyes, unwilling or unable to talk amongst themselves about the unspeakable things that had evidently taken place in this chamber of horrors.

“Dead?” answered Harry softly. “No, death would be merciful. No dying allowed as long as you can still be of use,” Harry said, matter-of-factly.

His almost-cavalier manner seemed to have surprised his friends, but it was the only way he could bring himself to deal with the present situation. Everybody was outpouring feelings of shock and pity, and he had to shield himself from the onslaught, so he could better sense what was coming from his other self on the floor. Even Dumbledore seemed at a complete loss.

Lupin, on the other hand, didn’t even question Harry’s demeanor and instead went on calmly, “Has he lost his mind?”

Talking about his injured self in third person seemed to make this easier to handle somehow, and so Harry answered Lupin in kind.

Harry replied, “He still retains his primeval self-awareness, if that’s what you mean. Going insane also isn’t allowed; at least not for prolonged amounts of time. No checking out of reality permanently,

because then Voldemort would lose control over what's left of his mind."

Harry heard everyone wince or draw in breath and hold it, the deeper he described what had happened here over the last while. Thoughts of how insanity could possibly be a form of mercy were now going through their minds.

"Is there a reason he's not moving? How long has it been since he ate or drank?" Lupin looked up at him and questioned.

"Well," discerned Harry in concentration, "the first day he was here, Wormtail attempted to give him something. But he chucked it back his face, because he knew it would only give Voldemort the satisfaction of making him live even longer." The traitor Marauder had also used his silver hand to suspend and nearly asphyxiate Harry in retaliation, but Harry omitted that detail for the sake of those present. A grim, yet fierce note of pride had crept into Harry's voice as he added, "It was the only form of punishment he'd really brought on himself since his arrival here; his rebellious ingratitude was rewarded with lack of any nourishment whatsoever."

Sympathy filled Lupin's eyes as they slowly slid shut; everyone else was hit with the realisation of the meaning of that statement just two seconds later. The party began to press their lips shut and tears started filling their eyes. Before Harry was brought here, he had been in the hospital after the car wreck and had therefore been unable to feed himself. That meant the last time he'd had one scrap of food had been on the Hogwarts Express...an interminable two weeks ago. Dehydration and starvation had just been added to Voldemort's laundry list of crimes against Harry.

The strengthening of Harry's voice caused some sort of response from his counterpart's prone form on the floor, as a weak moan escaped him and he began to stir. All those looking on had gasped hopefully, as this had been the only positive acknowledgment that he was alive at all.

Hesitantly, Lupin stepped closer to Harry's body on the floor and the boy made a feeble effort to throw his arms up over his head, but

merely succeeded in burying his head against his chest and cowering in fear. Hands flew to mouths at this blatantly uncharacteristic reaction of their friend.

“Professor Dumbledore, Tonks, Snape?” called out Lupin, still looking at Harry on the floor, “I think it best if we now take these other students out of the chamber,” he said sternly. “I daresay they’ve all been through a lot, and could certainly use a hot bath and a meal.”

Nobody uttered one word of disagreement, but it was clear what Lupin was doing—at least to Harry. This is not something that children should see.

“Yeah,” said Hagrid, finding his voice, “none of yeh knows what Azkaban is like,” and he ran a hand over his moist eyes. “None of yeh.”

Hagrid had been silently weeping as he looked on. Though Harry had allegedly “died” and escaped his sentencing to Azkaban for attempted murder by the Ministry, even the half-giant recognised that Harry had been forced to carry it out anyway. Only, this was much, much worse than Azkaban—it was a private hell on earth.

Everyone Lupin addressed—even Snape—turned to shuffle as soundlessly as possible out of the chamber, and a few words between the former professor and the headmaster were spoken about meeting up later. Hagrid went to leave too, as more words were spoken about how it was best to introduce Harry back to human contact as gradually as possible, but Lupin requested he stay instead.

Turning back toward Lupin, Harry was addressed by him again. “And he knows we’re here, is that right? And who we are?” It surprised Harry that Lupin had distinguished this much by simply looking at the person on the cold stone.

“Yes. Problem is he thinks he’s hallucinating. That, or you’re Voldemort’s latest stab at deceiving and provoking a reaction out of him again.”

“Is there also a reason he won’t speak? Besides the dehydration and weakness, I mean.”

Harry shook his head and said simply, “He just...can’t.” Lupin’s eyebrows puckered and he answered Harry, “Yes, that’s right—not without you, at any rate,” and Harry affirmed the assumption.

“Has he been sleepin’?” inquired Hagrid suddenly. “I ‘member gettin’ ter sleep in Azkaban, e’en if it was on’y ter ha’ the nightmares.”

Shrugging, Harry said, “No, sleeping isn’t—“

“Isn’t allowed, yes,” Lupin finished for him, a tad bitterly. “The question is why?”

“He is who he is, Professor,” Harry said fatalistically. “Taking into account this is Voldemort, does there really need to be a reason?”

Lupin saw through Harry’s feigned indifference straightaway as he replied meaningfully, “I’m sure several reasons exist. Why don’t you share them with me?”

Harry was reluctantly swept up into Lupin’s patented counselor mode. Hagrid seemed to understand the need to stay quiet.

Sighing annoyedly, Harry replied, “Three main ones: revenge, personal entertainment, and...bait,” he ended in a glacial whisper.

Looking at him sharply, Lupin repeated, “Bait? For whom?”

Harry hadn’t had a chance to explain the “Voldemort is freaked-out I may avenge my death” factor yet. What Lupin knew was purely second-hand information from Harry’s friends.

“Me.”

“You?” Lupin scowled at him slightly in concentration. “Why is Voldemort seeking to get at you, when he can kill him outright?” Gesturing to Harry’s double on the floor, he continued, “Why all the elaborate methods of torture? No food, no water, no human contact,

no sleep, no withdrawal, not to mention no soul.... Any single one of these things would have driven anybody else over the edge a hundred times by now. What about him, Harry? Why won't he die?"

Staring forlornly at himself on the floor, Harry's voice took on a note of distress as he tried to sift through the primitive thoughts nearby. "He's tried. Several times, Remus." His eyes shut tight as he continued reciting aloud the thoughts that strained through his mind, "But he can't manage to do it! He always gets stopped, or pulled back somehow. He—" Harry's voice cracked as he said these next words in a mixture of anguish and amazement, "—doesn't know how to die!"

The words seemed to echo in the chamber, and the boy on the floor stirred slightly once more. Again, Harry heard Hagrid's sniffing in the background, and Harry felt his own eyes start to fill with unwanted tears.

"And how does that make you feel? That he's not even given the choice of his own parting?"

Clenching his hands into fists, Harry drew in a deep breath and attempted to steady himself and failed. What exactly did Lupin think he was trying to accomplish at the moment?

"If you need to cry, Harry, go straight ahead. Remember there's absolutely no recourse if you do."

"But he's cried enough already," reminded Harry bitterly, getting worked up in spite of himself.

"Because he was forced to! There's nothing shameful about crying for yourself once in a while."

Coming forward and aiming pointedly, Lupin continued his admonishment. "Look at him, Harry! Look at you! How can you stand there, and profess that you should feel nothing? That's not a standard you'd expect out of anybody else, if you happen to see them in a similar position. I know this to be true—especially since I am a personal recipient of Lily's, and therefore your vast empathy."

Suddenly, as Harry caught Lupin's eye, he felt himself get dragged into a memory of some years past. He was at the edge of the Dark Forest on the Hogwarts grounds, surrounded by Ron, Hermione, and Snape. Shockingly however, it was from a completely different point of view—Lupin's. He felt himself to be much taller, much more feral in nature, and...he also caught full image of himself at the end of third year. Harry was re-experiencing the night of the time-turner incident when he had narrowly escaped a certain werewolf's wrath, due to intervention by his friends. "Professor?" Harry heard a younger voice inquire worriedly. Shortly thereafter, the memory dissolved around he and Lupin, and so too did Harry begin to dissolve into tears as he looked upon himself on the floor.

"You do remember!" choked out Harry through his revelation. "You...you know!" as he shook for a time, and for once didn't bother to hide his tears.

"How could I possibly forget the compassion of three 13-year-old wizards who tried to reach me, and at the cost of their own lives?" Lupin's eyes began to get shiny with moisture as he blinked and continued, "And yes, you might say I'd know a little something about dealing with basic instincts and emotions." A solitary tear escaped the corner of his eye and he said, "You've already determined not to let your experiences eat you from the outside in. Don't let it do so from the inside out, either. If you learn nothing else from this, it's that psychological death is even more frightening than physical, because it's much sneakier at being self-imposed."

Then Lupin said, with utmost kindness about the boy on the stone, "He can't help how he feels toward you, but you can change how you feel toward him—toward yourself. Don't let Voldemort win. For his sake—he's held on for you this long." Lupin gestured behind him to Harry's double on the cold granite.

A startlingly loud honking noise filled the air as Hagrid blew his nose into his tablecloth-sized hankie. "Sorry," he apologised gruffly, then after clearing his throat, "Well said, Professor. Well said."

Harry's storm of tears had been surprisingly short, but no less needed. "I can certainly understand why my father chose you for a friend,"

Harry smiled softly, “you do know how to get straight at the heart of a matter, once you set yourself to it—Remus.” For some reason, it felt good to refer to Lupin this way—it felt right.

Staring at Harry, Lupin said, “You know, I can’t decide what about you saying that gets to me the most; the fact that you sound just like James, you spoke words like Sirius, you resemble them both at the moment—and are a ghost yourself right now. It’s like I’m being visited by all three of you at the same time.” Harry merely arched an eyebrow in amused response.

Smacking his forehead, Lupin begged, “Please don’t do that anymore, Harry. All jesting aside, it’s a good thing to know reports of your death have been greatly exaggerated. A most gratifying change of events,” and then he smiled the hugest smile Harry had ever seen light up his face. And then it just occurred to Harry...Remus was the last good Marauder...

Then the former professor’s face softened once more as he turned to the less fortunate young man on the floor. “Time for our level best, Hagrid. Someone needs us.”

Dear Readers,

Thank you, thank you, thank you. Thank you so much for all of your wonderful heartfelt reviews, by way of this site and otherwise. I wanted honest opinions, and I got them...I appreciate it more than I can even express. You know who each of you are, too...those weren't just reviews, those were letters from the heart.

And so, I present for your very much reading pleasure, a reclamation. Love and Enjoy, Rae ;)

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At first, Harry had been a bit mystified as to why Lupin had originally asked Hagrid to stay behind. But then he remembered just how Lupin had an uncanny ability to pick and choose people for precisely the right feats, even when the people didn't know they were capable of doing said feats beforehand. Harry distinctively recalled two separate incidents that he had personally watched or experienced; Neville and the Snape-boggart, and the whole thing about giving Harry a chance to learn the Patronus Charm in the first place. He marvelously looked on as Hagrid and Lupin worked smoothly together, and continued to conjure a small miracle seemingly out of nothing in the space of about twenty-five minutes.

Although initially very wary, Harry's counterpart on the floor had at least allowed Hagrid to approach him without curling up as he'd done with Lupin. The vulnerable boy tracked the half-giant's every move as best he could, despite exhaustion beyond exhaustion, and the absence of glasses to focus the blurriness. This was by no means a sign of trust, but Harry could tell that his double was now beginning to wonder why several people had bothered showing up only just to leave. His counterpart was used to anything he saw being an illusion or a prelude of more horrors to come.

Lupin also pointed out Harry's double recognising anything as a "hallucination" was an extremely good sign—it was a higher mental function to even notice a difference between reality and anything else—especially since that line had been obliterated repeatedly by

Voldemort in the mind of Harry's opposite. It had just become near impossible for the poor boy to sort out which was which.

Another thing Lupin established to Hagrid was the need to constantly use a name for Harry's counterpart—as an anchor of sorts and means of recognition that he was still a sentient person. But as Hagrid called the boy on the floor “Harry”, it became apparent to Lupin and the half-giant just how much lasting damage Lord Voldemort's influence had caused in the young man's psyche. Harry had sensed it from the very start, but it still caused a momentary shot of despair to run rampant through him as he watched the face of his twin contort with utmost revulsion at the mention of his own name.

Here was the crux of Voldemort's horrors—he had managed to hammer a wedge of malice between Harry and his own corporeal self; making his very mirror image turn away in seemingly unfathomable animosity and reject him. Harry was at a loss to explain it—all he could feel was the waves of abhorrence that roiled from his other half on the floor. Harry then remembered what Lupin said about the young man not having any control over his emotions and tried to deal with accordingly. It was beyond tragedy or distress—having your own self...hate you.

Rather than losing more time on the problem, Lupin also accepted it, and said, “Well, if he considers himself separate from you now, we still need to call him something. ‘Hey you’ just isn't going to work. He needs to focus on getting better, not being mad.” So Lupin then asked Harry if he'd had any nicknames in the past that his double would respond to favourably. Harry couldn't think of a single instance—“Potty” and “Scarhead” were definitely not nicknames he'd responded to in a positive way, so he doubted that his double would either.

Turning to face the boy on the floor again, Lupin asked, “James? Should we call you ‘James?’” Harry could tell without even trying that name was another one he didn't like, and told Lupin as much. So Lupin then said, “How about ‘Jamie?’ Can you deal with that?” to Harry's counterpart, and looked up at Harry for confirmation. “Better,” said Harry, considering his other's reaction.

That settled, Lupin told the self-proclaimed Jamie, step-by-step, how they needed to get him up off the freezing, filthy floor and clean him up a bit. Lupin also explained to Harry how he'd suspected some sort of hypothermic shock due to exposure and cold. The best way to alleviate and reverse those symptoms was to expose as much of "Jamie's" surface skin area as possible next to a heat source. Hagrid's help at this point became a very important factor, and Lupin also explained, in a little by little manner how Hagrid was going to come up behind Jamie, pick him up, and place him on his lap.

At first, the whole idea seemed a bit absurd to Harry; a grown boy sitting on someone's lap. But then he remembered just how little physical consideration his double—Jamie, he reminded himself sadly—had received at all lately...try none. No, less than none. Harry remembered from personal encounters precisely how gentle Hagrid could be; if the half-giant could sing lullabies to dragons, he would perform a symphony of the heart for Jamie. Except for a very limited amount of time, Harry had trusted Hagrid implicitly for the duration of their entire friendship. Dear Hagrid—his first wizard friend—in fact first friend ever—had indeed been the perfect choice for this state of affairs. Jamie was drinking in all of this positive attention...though Harry could tell he was still a bit mystified as to why someone hadn't tried to hurt him yet—another sad yet understandable reaction.

As Hagrid sat back powwow-style and held Jamie in the crook of his ample elbow, Lupin conjured a basin of warm water and several linen washcloths. Ten days' worth of slime, soil, and stain was at last removed from the skin of Voldemort's latest innocent victim. This had the effect of making Jamie confused; even through his exhaustion, he simply couldn't imagine why they were doing this for him. But it was also breaking down his barrier of mistrust....

Suddenly, and without warning, Jamie's eyes rolled back in his head and he started to shudder convulsively. The moisture now on his skin was exposed to the rather frigid air and he was shivering in uncontrollable waves. Hagrid was having a difficult time holding onto him because the quaking was so violent.

"He's cold! No, freezing!" yelled Harry. It was horrible to watch and yet be unable to do anything. A blanket was quickly conjured and

placed over Jamie, but he inadvertently managed to shake it off him, he was quivering so badly.

Swearing quietly under his breath, Lupin said, "I was hoping he'd be spared this, but it was hard to tell what was causing his lethargy. Apparently he was slipping into advanced hypothermia when we found him. Damn! We are so close..." It was very disconcerting to see someone as usually collected as Lupin start to lose his cool. But then he looked over in the corner behind Harry and said, "What is this?" and he walked passed Harry to more directly point out what he was talking about.

It was a mid-sized black leather bag, with a silver buckle on the front that held the engraving "S.S."

"It's Snape's travelling satchel. What on earth is it doing here? I can't even remember him having brought it along. Maybe there's something in here we can give Jamie..." then he began rooting around the odd contents. Straight on top was a small case of potions phials. Lupin dropped the bag and marched straight back over to Hagrid with a particular phial and asked him to assist in getting Jamie to drink it. Hagrid cradled the back of Jamie's neck, Lupin poured the liquid down his throat, held the boy's jaw shut, and let nature's swallowing reflex do the rest. With an air of satisfaction, Lupin watched as Jamie's eyes closed tight shut, all shaking ceased, and he went rigid for about fifteen seconds.

However, when Jamie opened his eyes, they were more clear and lucid than they had ever been thus far, he was able to turn his head this way and that, and he even tried to make a frail grab for the empty phial in Lupin's palm.

"He likes it!" Harry exclaimed, smiling incredulously. "What was that stuff, Remus?" Hagrid and Lupin exchanged a look as the former professor conjured a tall glass of water and said, "Chaser, Rubeus. Let him sip it slowly, so he doesn't toss it," and Hagrid's beetle-black eyes twinkled knowingly. "Righ' yeh are, Professor. If tha' is wha' I think it is..." trailed off Hagrid.

“That, my dear Harry,” Lupin said proudly, “is ‘Cocoa-banger’. And irrefutable ‘proof’ of the fact you are your father’s son—pun intended, I might add.” Continuing on a smile, Lupin said, “Once, purely as a prank, Sirius and I blackmailed Severus into spiking James’s hot chocolate with something powerful and...a tad nasty. But James, little bugger, developed a taste for the stuff. He actually convinced Severus to distill the wizard chocolate and elixir together so he would be able to drink it regularly from a concentrate—the end result of which just quite satisfactorily thawed out your counterpart over here. Small wonder he likes it—he’s a Potter.”

It was just too ironic Lupin and fermented wizard chocolate happened to be the things that pulled Jamie out of his funk. Harry told Lupin as much and Remus rejoined, “You don’t know the half of it. I suspect that’s why Severus had a viable mix of it in the first place. Back when I was teaching, I remembered about Cocoa-banger and asked Severus if he still had the recipe. The reason why is because at that time, certain boy I knew was both having terrible problems fainting due to exposure with dementors as well as never eating enough of the chocolate I gave him to alleviate the affects thereof,” Lupin said significantly, and Harry gave him a sheepish grin. “But then, oops,” said Lupin, “you learned the Patronus Charm. No wizard chocolate concentrate needed. Not until now, at any rate.”

Then Remus started another play-by-play explanation to Jamie how they needed to clean out his wounds.

Out of sheer curiosity, Harry inquired Lupin as to why he bothered with all the detailed clarification. The former professor kindly informed him, “Harry, this is what it’s like for any one of us when we are stripped of our defences and humanity. One does not need to be a werewolf to have experienced these things. What makes it worse for Jamie here is that he couldn’t even push anyone away if he wanted to—so he would most likely turn on himself again. In fact, he really has no reason to have confidence in us at all right now, considering what he’s been through. We’re just lucky he recognises us; I also submit that’s largely because of your proximity with him,” he said considerably.

Turning to face Harry fully, Lupin continued, “By explaining what we’re doing in a simplified manner, it not only gives his quite-obviously alert mind something to focus on, but it also lets him know we respect his rights as an individual—but most importantly as an equal. The quickest way to do that is if physical boundary lines are re-established. Meaning, if they need to be crossed in any manner—even if it’s just to assist him—he needs to know. Simple as that.”

Not for the first time, Harry wondered how Lupin came to know so much about the human psyche, and asked him as much.

“I cannot take full credit for my education in that particular field. As a matter of fact, the people who did most of that for me were the Marauders themselves.”

Lupin had gone back over and grabbed the black satchel to bring it next to him and Hagrid. Then he removed a phial of something clear and soaked a washcloth with it, and said, “When I was a teenager, I was quite afraid of my werewolf side and didn’t care to hardly acknowledge the fact I had it at all. Once the Marauders found out, however, they began not only to research it extensively; but also to steep themselves in all of the lore and beliefs that it involved. A lot of what they came to know was by direct field research with yours truly. It was by peril and danger through trial and error, and yes...sheer cussedness and stupidity, too. But their uncommon clarity for understanding the differences and similarities between man and beast was, quite literally, what helped them all to become such superior Animagi.”

It intrigued Harry to learn more about this deviant side of not only his father, but Sirius and Remus as well—fascinating subjects, all around.

As Lupin cleared out the extensive wounds on Jamie’s limbs, Jamie began to wince and make sounds of painful protest. Harry deduced Lupin must have been using a disinfectant of some type. “Yes, I know that hurts,” Remus said kindheartedly to Jamie. Then he turned to Harry and asked, “It’s not causing him to fear us, is it? These are quite deep, even for fingernail markings.”

Discerning once more, Harry concentrated on what was going through Jamie's consciousness...it was...different...than...could he really be...

Then Harry watched as his double, quite astoundingly, reached up a tremulous hand to trace the scars across Lupin's face, followed by the ones on his own forehead—the lightning bolt and the gash caused by the crash. Now concentrating even harder, Jamie struggled to push back the sleeve on Lupin's arm to trace the scars there, and then again, quite miraculously, he traced the once-bleeding tracts across his own arms—the ones which Lupin was just now helping to cleanse.

"He knows," Harry breathed. "He knows you're here to help—he trusts you now. I can feel it!"

Then Hagrid broke the amazed silence with, "Yeh'd ha' ter be a codswallop in' blatherskite no' ter ha' noticed that," he replied, as Harry, Lupin, and Hagrid exchanged looks of hope and admiration.

"Well said, Professor," said Lupin in happy astonishment. Then, "Harry...as I've stated, if nothing else does so, this should prove to you he's in there somewhere. Or rather, you're in there somewhere." It was like watching the visual representation of the very conversation Harry and Lupin had just a few minutes previous....

"I realise another thing you're wondering," said Lupin as he continued with Jamie's wounds, "is why I bother with names and explanation so much. It was James who happened to discover the names Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs for us all, incidentally. Those weren't just clever nicks—they also happen to be the names that we'd all referred ourselves to—only in our animalistic forms. I'm still at a loss to explain how James discerned that. But straightforwardly, of the four of us, James was the one who could most easily communicate with the other creatures in the Dark Forest. It was also him who'd pretty much helped to develop our 'Battlefield Bandaging' technique."

Lupin bit his bottom lip in remembrance and continued, "He'd discovered the quickest way to get close to an injured party was to use their name—the name created a bridge of familiarity, and helped

to calm down the injured person in question. I can remember many times, as a werewolf, when I had received grievous wounds from other animals in the forest, and basically should've been left for dead."

Then he shook his head, lost in memory, "One particularly dangerous night, James actually negotiated a cliff—as a stag—but he couldn't help me the way he needed to as an Animagus. So he transfigured...." Harry found himself pulled into another memory—one that wasn't his. He could feel himself to be badly hurt...he was panting and terrified...something was coming down the mountainside toward him...he could smell it...it was another animal—a large one with antlers. Was it going to attack him? He couldn't even run away. "Moony?" said a concerned male voice softly. A human? How had a human known his name? "Moony, it's me—Prongs. Please, don't fight me. I'm going to come around and help you...you're hurt...." and he finished the memory off, watching as the shadow-image of a teenage James assisted Moony in effort to keep him from bleeding to death. Eminently fascinating. It generally pleased Harry to know more about his father's infamous behaviour as a Marauder, as long as it didn't involve memories of Snape. Harry told Lupin as much, as Remus conjured some bandages and began covering Jamie's wounds.

"Well, it didn't always work out, you know." Then Lupin raised his head to look at Harry and said, "One full moon, I was very confused and inadvertently chucked one of my friends into the half-frozen lake without knowing or remembering that I'd done it. It was only through sheer dumb luck that I'd come across them, at the lake's edge the next morning—they'd managed to dredge themselves up, but that was about it. Hagrid bailed us all out that time—kept the incident under wraps from Dumbledore."

Hagrid half-smiled grimly, and Harry thought, not for the first time, how it was a wondrous thing he and his father had such a similar relationship with Hagrid, without Harry having known about it beforehand.

Lupin went on, "I felt ashamed that I knew nothing about the effects of hypothermia or how to treat it because of that incident, and therefore learned anything and everything I could about it, if for nothing else

than I would never be caught unprepared for my friends again. I already owed them so much.”

“Now,” said Lupin to Jamie, “we’ve got to make you fit to travel.” Looking at Harry dubiously, Remus continued, “Unfortunately it appears the only attire we have to choose from is that which Snape has so unknowingly bestowed us with.”

Then he smirked and said, “How about it, Harry? Do you mind looking like a cross between Dracula and Morgana dressed in funeral garb?”

It was so profoundly hilarious to hear the normally unflappable Remus speak about his former rival in such a manner, Harry couldn’t help but laugh, despite the fact Jamie would most likely have to be dressed as an out-of-style undertaker for the next while. After all, they were still under the time constraint of “moonrise” according to the poem.

Suddenly, Lupin drew in a long inhalation of astonishment as he looked into the remaining contents of Snape’s mysteriously placed traveling satchel. “Hello? What have we here....” and then he upturned the items of the bag into the crook of his arm. The apparel they all saw was most decidedly not something that would have ever come out of Snape’s wardrobe.

The contents included a full change of Muggle boys’ clothing; complete with belt-set jeans, t-shirt, overshirt, socks, shoes, and shorts.

Harry, Hagrid, and Lupin each wore the same slack-jawed looks as Lupin, out of morbid curiosity, flipped the belt over to read the personalised engraving on the back of the small Gryffindor buckle. “H.J.P.” it read.

No doubt about it now—these were indeed Harry’s own clothes.

“What the bloody hell?” Harry yawned aloud in horror. The sheer disgusting-gross-out factor had just shot off the scale at the thought of his own underpants having been riding around in Snape’s luggage.

It made the idea of looking like a geezer gothic vampire seem almost appealing.

“Yeh jus’ took the words righ’ ou’ ter my mou’, Harry,” agreed Hagrid incredulously.

“Regardless,” said Lupin softly, “I daresay Severus has a lot of explaining to do. In due time, gentlemen,” he said firmly.

Rooting around in the bag one last time, he came out with two pair of something—a pair of shears and a pair of Harry’s glasses—thereby removing all doubt of the fact Harry’s clothes had indeed been stumbled upon.

“Hope you don’t mind,” Lupin said to Jamie, and looked up at Harry, “his hair is hopeless. It’s got to go. Sorry.”

Harry just shrugged as Lupin used the shears to remove the mangy tangle that Jamie’s hair had become. Anyway, it didn’t matter much—he could probably just grow it out again later, if he wanted to. It also had a rather pronounced effect—“Jamie” was actually starting to look like a boy instead of the waif-like person they had originally found bleeding on the granite floor.

When they started to dress him, the effect was instantaneous. Jamie knew exactly what clothes meant. And shoes. Harry could read the thoughts like a beacon now, they ran together: Clothes!go!shoes!leave!nothurt!must!YAY!gone!nomore!NOW! It had the added bonus of making Jamie quite wiggly and noisy—at least as much as he could get, considering.

It would have been funny, watching Lupin and Hagrid struggle to put clothes on a 16-year-old boy, but Lupin pointed out seriously, “Having survived ten days of hell, not only believing you’d never escape, but you’d have to kill yourself in order to leave. I’d be turning handsprings about seeing it all left behind me.”

Lupin was right—this wasn’t amusing in the slightest—it was...sobering. Is that possible? To be humbled by your own self? Harry contemplated, trying not to go mad in the process.

Lupin went over to the small recessed case where Harry had pointed out his damaged holly wand was hidden in the wall. "And here it is..." Remus said aloud, "the tool of exoneration.... Just to think, it was here all this time, and so were you...." He turned toward Harry and said softly, "How can you ever forgive us, Harry?"

"For what?" asked Harry, a bit mystified as to Lupin's sudden somberness.

"For not knowing. For believing you dead, when it was so much worse...." Harry was...floored. Remus? Feeling...guilty? It wasn't the Order's fault he'd been presumed dead, or anybody else but those three Slytherins, Voldemort, and whomever else was involved. But not...the fault of his friends. Sure, he could get all bitter about them not knowing, but...that was pointless and stupid! Harry himself hadn't even known that he wasn't really dead. What could you do? Close this conversation and get the hell out of here, Harry thought. Jamie's "raring to go" attitude was infectious.

"Remus, how could I not forgive you? Thanks to you and Hagrid, I still have—a 'me' to go back to."

Whatever that means, thought Harry ruefully. He wondered why the stuff he said in these situations always had to sound so corny. It seemed to help though as Lupin smiled a bit and they walked back over to Hagrid and a struggling Jamie.

Jamie was not happy at all with the state of affairs at the moment. He'd had quite enough of being held and kept under blankets, thank you very much. Once he'd trusted Remus and Rubeus, and knew he was going to leave, it had transformed Jamie into an entirely different person. Harry was filled with an odd need to apologise for some reason. So sorry about... myself? The other me? Perhaps it was a good thing Jamie had picked himself out a different name. Harry knew he was having enough trouble keeping all of the tenses and pronouns sorted out.

Unfortunately for Jamie, he didn't even have the strength to shove off of Hagrid, much less stand and walk. His brain said otherwise,

however. Harry's other half was filled with enough resentment at the moment for five people...no, strike that. Twelve people. And he was getting even angrier as they started on their way out.

Just as they were about to pass the threshold, Jamie, in a completely unprecedented and furious manner, reached out both hands to the side of the exit, and pulled himself bodily out of Hagrid's arms.

"WOAH!" they all shouted, as Lupin rushed forward and caught Jamie a split second before he hit floor again.

"What is he doing!" Harry exclaimed. He was the only one who seemed to not know what was going on, however.

Remus turned to Hagrid and said excitedly, "Are you thinking what I am, Rubeus?" They wordlessly agreed on repositioning themselves around Jamie. Lupin had resituated Jamie and was now holding onto his waist and standing behind him in front of the doorway, at the lowest possible crossing point. Hagrid was completely opposite them on the other side, now facing Jamie and Lupin. Were they really going to let Jamie do what it looked like they were? Harry demanded of Lupin as much.

Remus just shook his head, smiled, and said happily, "You of all people should recognise *raison d'être*! The finish line! Beating impossible odds! With your shield, not on it!" Then he cautiously let his arm slip from Jamie's waist and yelled, "Come on! You can do it!"

"S'right!" shouted Hagrid from the other side. "Yeh started it, now yeh finish it!"

Jamie was actually standing upright by himself! It was clearly paining him and he was beginning to sway, but Harry could feel the determination seething off him in currents. The exhilaration filling the air was palpable.

"You have to WIN!"

"Figh' it! I know yeh can!"

But it didn't look like he could. Jamie was starting to wilt under his own weight. It was such a shame—because he was so close! Three steps and it would all be over! He just needed more encouragement, that was all! Dear Godric, was Harry really going to cheer his own self on?

“JUST DO IT! GO!” Yep. Apparently he was.

It also appeared to be precisely what was needed; after turning toward his opposite with a glance of wonder, they all watched as Harry (Jamie) Potter, pronounced dead, believed dead, better off dead, and in characteristic defiance of all logic, odds, or sanity, took three brave steps and walked out of his ten-day prison by the power of his own two feet.

Dear Readers,

I would first like to take this moment to say, in true tribute to Oscars, “You love me! You really love me!” Yes, I received my 100 reviews and then some. I’d like to thank each and every one of you, but the text manager would edit out the repetitions, so I’ll just say “one hundred times thank you!”

I’m so very glad that you liked this last chapter so much as well. It was certainly a delight to write. As I have been an in-home care specialist and assistant, I know quite personally what it would take to help heal someone in Harry’s/Jamie’s position. You saw quite a bit of me in the last pages.

Just to clarify, I did not give Harry’s body a second name to confuse anybody; in fact it was quite the opposite—I had several reasons. The first was to illustrate the dichotomy Lord Voldemort had caused...what better way to do that than give Jamie a different name? Second of all, forever calling Harry’s body “the double,” “twin”, or “mirror” got incessantly old, and it was almost impossible for me to read back to myself without getting confused, especially when Harry had cause to look at himself. It would have also been utterly confusing for the poor characters...Lupin and Hagrid calling one Harry and the other Harry, especially in succession. I briefly considered calling the two Harrys “ghostie-Harry” and “stone-Harry” but for some odd reason, that just didn’t...seem to work either. Hehehe! Third and lastly, even though Harry’s body is all Harry—he has to be after all—Jamie still has a distinct personality all by himself. Again what better way to illustrate that than by having him choose his own name?

Also for clarification, Jamie has not had the dementor’s kiss performed on him. He was supposed to, but as stated in chapter 14, “Harry (Jamie) had done Voldemort the very great disservice of... not having a soul to suck.” Talk about a wickedly disappointed soul-eater. I can only imagine how Voldie haggled his way out of that one... “No, you can’t have mine. Just wait, I’ll get Harry for you—pinky swear.” Ghostie Harry, in the sense I am referring to right now...is the soul. Harry, the spirit as he is, belongs inside of Jamie, who as you know,

is Harry's body. Clear as mud? Excellent! As always, Enjoy. P.S. This is comic relief chapter mark II. Love, Rae ;D

BREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAK

It was an amazing thing really; Harry had practically disbelieved even a remote improvement of his physical form not a half-hour previous to its phenomenal carnal resurgence. It wasn't that he had seriously thought about not returning to his physical state, or was it? Don't think about that, he reminded himself. Ever again. It was just...very...worrisome in that regard. Voldemort's possession of Harry's body in the Department of Mysteries not one month ago had caused Harry to want to die, but that was still very different than what had happened with Jamie.

Not once could Harry, the spirit, ever recall having felt so much anguish and despair and pain that he felt like ending it all was the sole alternative out. Looking on what happens to yourself when you lose literally everything has a way of shifting your perceptions. Jamie hadn't even a hope of a hope and he knew it; nobody had known where he was for ten days, and for some reason, he had known that too. The overall defeatist quality of Jamie's actions since day one had been the things that had most disturbed Harry. That was the whole impetus behind his double's starve-out tactic, amongst many other things, so he could at least get out as soon as he possibly could. Admittedly, it was cold comfort to know that Jamie, even in his reduced state, hadn't even considered trying to beg or plead for cessation of anything from Voldemort.

And yet, with the most basic of all things—the proper cocoon of human kindness, water, and raiment—Jamie had been instilled with the most important thing one's body needs—belief that one could make it. Even when Jamie couldn't generate it from within, he'd borrowed the power from others. So carries that magic of spirit; Harry hadn't been wrong when he saw that Jamie's ability to walk out of the chamber was a physical impossibility, because it was. Harry had been blinded by extreme appearances. Hagrid and Remus didn't have such limitations; each of these men knew only too well what it was like to be judged solely on appearance or heritage...or any other factor of blood.

Human frailty and weakness was something Harry had never been able to bide by in himself. Seeing what had happened to his mirror image after Voldemort's latest doings had caused such shock within Harry, that he'd temporarily encased his heart and mind in mental layers of ice. Apparently, denial of physical acquiescence could be a double-edged sword, however. It was Lupin who had forcefully opened Harry's eyes and made him see although what had happened to his physical body was intolerable and unforgivable in its severity; it was still something that could be surmounted. Remus had also pointed out Harry...basically owed it to himself—or "Jamie"—to give this "life thing" another go.

Once again, because of the selflessness of those he knew, Harry had been preserved when otherwise incapable of saving himself—spiritually, emotionally, and physically—thrice in the space of one hour. Another miracle. It had certainly already been a night full of them. It also filled Harry with a strange mixture of consternation and admiration that he'd had to play the rescued instead of the rescuer so many times in succession. The role reversal of "saving people thing" to "people saving thing" was impossible to put into words. It was also quite heartening to know that he still hadn't gone far enough around the bend to forget feeling thankful when he should.

Harry struggled to convey his boundless gratitude during their brief celebration following Jamie's walk of victory, but words failed him once more. At the moment, the biggest reason why was because of the look on Jamie's face. He was smiling—giving Harry a genuine smile, without any hint of residual hatred. Then it slammed into Harry just why his double had been so angry. He had not yet been given a chance to show them how strong he really was. From a perspective nobody should have cause to recognise, Harry witnessed his own physical body display that ingrained need to prove himself; prove that he was still worth keeping around. That, even more than the act which inspired it would have given Harry chills, had he been able to feel them. All he could do at the moment was stare. But as he did, Harry was filled with real hope that he could make it through this—both of him. It was proof the process of healing and self-renewal had already begun.

Harry tried one last time to speak to Lupin about it outside the elevator, but Remus merely deflected it by saying, "You don't give yourself—or him—enough credit, Harry. You need to remember that even glass is made from tempered grit." And then Remus smiled, turned toward Hagrid, and affectionately squeezed a sleeping Jamie on the shoulder. Harry had the distinct feeling Remus would've done the same thing to him, had it been possible. Lupin said, "Even though it won't be a real sleep without you—still dreamless—at least he can get some semblance of rest for now. I daresay the lad could use it," and then he went to cover Jamie with the oft-discarded blanket. Bollocks to that.

"One thing, Remus." Harry still had his pride, after all. "Could we forget the blanket?"

Lupin narrowed his eyes at him paternally. "But you saw, he almost got frozen out—"

"Trust me," insisted Harry, closing his eyes and gritting his teeth, "this isn't a 'him' thing, it's an 'us' thing. He escalated, "Meaning, I think 'the lad' had the right idea. So take my word for it and ditch that infernal blanket!" Then his eyes snapped open beseechingly, "Please."

All amusement dropped off Lupin's face and he said, with just a hint of frost, "Very well, if that's how you feel about it." Then he flipped the blanket out and as the edge made the final snap, it disappeared from sight. Remus and Hagrid resumed staring toward the inside of the elevator doors.

Whoops. Perhaps Harry had been a bit too enthusiastic about his request. But honestly, he was entitled. Hadn't he been through enough tonight already? Hellfire...and here Lupin was, presuming to act like Harry was overreacting. Well forget him. Annoyingly, he heard Hagrid start to make sniggering noises behind them. Was the half-giant really laughing at Harry's anger? Talk about insult to injury. How dare they—the both of them! If there was one thing anybody should have learned from the last hour, it was that you'd end up in a very bad way if you made Harry Potter mad. He now had the power to back up his healthy temper. At the age of thirteen, blowing up Aunt

Marge had just been the tip of what was an apparently colossally huge iceberg.

But then he noticed Lupin's shoulders were starting to shake. Comprehension started penetrating Harry's mind as he scowled and demanded, "Are you two actually teasing me, Remus?"

Lupin merely smiled benignly and said, "How else are we to convince you to lighten up?" Hagrid began chuckling openly now.

"Lighten up!" Harry sputtered, completely lost for words for an entirely different reason this time. Here he was, standing in this impossible magical elevator, after having come across his own funeral, after having found out his death was a lie, narrowly avoiding killing off his murderers, barely escaping being glomped by dementors, trying to psyche himself up for a rejoining to what was a dubiously depleted physical body, and now Lupin was telling him to lighten up.

"Too right," Remus replied, hidden smile making his nostrils flare. Then his eyes twinkled and he deadpanned, "Live a little."

That comment hit Harry like a sock to the chest, so he did the only thing he could. He threw back his head and laughed. Harry laughed till he cried, and then he laughed some more. Just the simple act of doing so brought on such feelings of much-needed relief; he could hardly bring it under control.

"Sorry," he said breathlessly, removing his glasses and rubbing his eyes, "just when I think I've seen it all, something reminds me that I'm not quite so far gone as I thought."

Remus heaved a great sigh of relief and said, "You have no idea how good it is to hear you say that." Harry experienced a feeling of déjà vu as Lupin smiled again and went on, "I'm glad I could help remind you. It might also help to know at one point in my life, I made a career out of diffusing the blazing tempers of those around me. The Marauders, although friends, were definitely a fiery lot. They weren't time-bombs or anything, but things could sometimes get rather touchy. Adding Severus or Lily was quite the explosive combination, I can tell you. And don't take this the wrong way, but...you, as you are right now,

are very much like James was like at your age. Eerily like him, even. I can...see where you leave off and he begins,” finished Remus, pointing and looking over at Jamie.

Turning around and contemplating the still-sleeping form in Hagrid's arms, Harry stated, “No really, it's okay. I know what you mean.” He was half-surprised the comparison to his father hadn't caused him to feel any anger at all this time. “Now that I know what happened, it's made me aware of what differences to look for.”

Then Harry bit his bottom lip and pondered, “There's all these—” he gestured, as if doing so would help him find words, “—pieces I can feel are missing.” He hovered his ghost-white hand over his twin's face, who shivered involuntarily in response.

“And...everything else still tries to compensate for the loss, I'm reckoning. But it's still not the same.” He looked up at Lupin and concluded, “Not at all.”

“I can only imagine what it's like to be literally missing your other half.” Remus shook his head and said deferentially, “If you must know, I can hardly believe how well you're handling this, Harry.”

Smiling ruefully, Harry corrected Lupin's mistaken assessment of the situation. “Erm, I haven't exactly been a saint, Remus. When I found out who ‘killed’ me, I just got pissed off. Really pissed off. So, for various reasons, I let them have it. I'm not eleven years old anymore, you know.”

And then he proceeded to tell Lupin, in a bit more detail, not only about the Slytherin incident, but anything else the former professor needed to be filled in on regarding the situation. Lupin and Hagrid interjected with pointed comments or questions during their ascent in the elevator, but it was still quite difficult for Harry to answer everything. He hadn't exactly got his own answers to the problems through normal, orthodox means. As a result, his knowledge was still somewhat patchy in parts. He told this to Lupin, who became intrigued with just how Harry had gone about his thought-gathering processes.

“All right,” said Remus, “I understand that you know things now that you didn’t know before entering the chamber. But how did you go from ‘not able to be seen’ as Seamus discussed, to blasting the chamber door open? And why wouldn’t your Parseltongue open it in the first place?” Hagrid seemed to want to ask more questions, but for Jamie’s sake, he kept movement and speaking to a minimum.

Harry got a rather...agitated look on his face and said, “The reason why my Parseltongue wouldn’t open the door was because Voldemort was expecting me—as I am, right now. Remember the ‘bait’ issue? He knew I’d need to get inside for him,” Harry pointed at his double again, determined not to get too angry this time. “What Voldemort hadn’t counted on was my actually trying to use the Imperius Curse with his wand. I don’t know what went on, but I messed it up somehow.” Continuing with a sheepish look, Harry said, “I’ve seen it done before—so I knew it didn’t really work—but it took me a bit to realise I couldn’t actually do it. It was confusing because I knew something happened with Ginny; I just didn’t know what. I still don’t, either.”

The corners of Harry’s lips upturned as he continued mischievously, “I also can’t quite explain how this happened, but...I...managed to do something to Voldemort, too. Drawing that...backlash from him...didn’t just hurt me, but it hurt him somehow. So, that’s why I haven’t been too concerned about him showing up—wherever he is, he’s not exactly in good shape.”

Hagrid and Lupin gaped openly at Harry as he finished his last statement. Silence filled the elevator again that night, but it was because of complete shocked amazement this time. Remus managed to find his voice, and asked incredulously, “You mean you actually managed to take the Lord Voldemort out of commission?” Harry nodded, just a tad self-consciously. Lupin got an appreciative look on his face as he elaborated, “No wonder you had the audacity to refer to him as ‘Mr. Evil.’ Braggart cockiness seems to be your beholding right at the moment, Harry.”

Hearing Remus point out his current change of attitude in such a succinct way would have caused Harry to blush his traditional embarrassed shade of crimson, but he turned a corresponding shade

of gunmetal silver instead. He might not be eleven any more, because it was just another welcome sign that Harry was still Harry; he grinned hugely, darting looks toward the corner of the elevator and back.

“Yeah, but it’s only temporary,” he warned.

Hagrid agreed with Lupin anyway, but in much more frank terms, “I’d be full o’ piss an’ wind, m’sel’.” After winning not just one, but two of his equivalents to a prize fight in one night, Harry had nearly fallen victim to what all cronked young men do in such situations—bragging rights. It was still odd to have someone else acknowledge the matter though, which is why Harry reacted to Lupin’s and Hagrid’s comments as he did. After a shared chuckle, the three of them resumed their interrupted line of conversation.

Remus studied Harry intently, “Based on what you’ve told me, I’ve got my own ideas about what you did instead of the Imperius Curse, but I need to speak with Dumbledore first to confirm it. Please continue with the description of your new abilities.”

This was quite a sight harder to do, as Harry needed to find a common frame of reference in order to explain how he had done what he did. Harry didn’t have a gift for detailed descriptions either, so this was going to take some doing. He decided to stick with what he knew, even if an equivalent didn’t exist in the wizard world. One that Harry knew about, anyway.

“How familiar are you with Muggle cinema?” he asked Lupin.

The former professor considered and answered, “Besides something called ‘Monty Python and the Holy Grail’, which Sirius seemed to have an infatuation with in the 70s, nothing. He tried to get the rest of the Marauders interested, but it failed miserably.” His nose wrinkling, Remus continued, “James, Peter, and I never figured out why Sirius fancied it so much. He would laugh like a madman at the thing, but the other three of us personally found it appalling that Muggles actually thought swallows could carry coconuts across entire continents. And the whole ‘coconuts for horses’ matter? If they didn’t have the budget, why didn’t they just share horses for their cast?”

Lupin shook his head out of pure mystification. “James tried to ask Lily about the whole ‘Castle Anthrax’ scene, with that ludicrous grail beacon, but she would just dissolve into fits of laughter about the thing.” Contemplating Harry, Remus confusedly went on, “Much like you are now.”

Harry couldn’t stand it; this was just too rich. He was doubled over laughing at the uproarious hilarity of it all. For whatever reason, Sirius had picked up on the fact Monty Python had nothing to do with that Muggles really thought. Was it any wonder that his then-teenaged godfather delighted in knowing something his best friends hadn’t the slightest clue about? And the fiasco that must’ve erupted when James attempted to ask Lily about that one scene in particular...Harry laughed even harder.

“That’s not real, that’s comedy!” he gasped out to Remus, between bouts of laughter. It was one of the few things Harry got to watch on Privet Drive that he actually sort of liked. Once, before Dudley had even reached an appreciable age (though Harry seriously doubted his cousin would ever reach an age of appreciation), Uncle Vernon had shown up one evening with the entire collection of Monty Python’s Flying Circus movies. Aunt Petunia was none too pleased, but Vernon had the ready excuse of saying it was “for the tyke.”

It was the one vice that his uncle had chiefly flouted in front of his wife; Uncle Vernon would watch the videos whenever she went out on her “evenings with ladies,” which were basically just gossip sessions between any of the other women who, like Petunia, had nothing better to do than spy on the neighbours. His uncle and Dudley being none the wiser, Harry would occasionally sneak out of wherever he was supposed to be and watch his relatives laugh it up together. Harry suspected Dudley was hardly smart enough to get any but the most basic of the jokes, but it was the last thing Harry held out for his uncle not being a complete git. Otherwise, the finer points of Monty Python would’ve been totally lost to Vernon; especially since inane behaviour was something that just happened to come naturally to the Dursleys.

“Oh well, that’s a relief,” Remus answered, and clearly meant it. “The whole witch scene really shocked me. I mean, who honestly believes that really small rocks can float? All witches having warts...I’m not one to question a person’s intelligence based on lineage, but I remember telling James he must’ve been very lucky to find a clever Muggle-born witch like Lily, and he heartily agreed. Although, wizards did have something like hand grenades back in the 13th century....”

“STOP!” Harry shouted. “Please Remus, you’re killing me here.”

Then they all realised what he just said, and the three of them chuckled again. Jamie was still out like a candle flame. It struck Harry as odd that he was laughing so much, considering the present situation, but he supposed that since this was an unavoidably highly emotional set of circumstances, he’d much rather be laughing than screaming. The former felt better as well as being healthier.

“At any rate,” continued Harry, wiping his eyes, “I was talking about the basic process of cinema; the way it’s filmed—generally spliced together in two to three hour blocks, which makes one movie. What I’m trying to compare it to is this: picture someone filming your life constantly. That’s what your memory is always doing, I guess. But...when I try to gather someone’s thoughts, it’s not nearly as linear. Imagine someone taking that same lifelong film and chopping it all up into random pieces and tossing them into a bin somewhere, and marking it as ‘filed’. The thoughts I’m keen for do come faster if I have a focus, but it only works if I’ve got the proper questions to ask. And even when I find what I’m seeking, there is so much detail involved, it’s much like trying to piece a single linking memory together in a series of jigsaw puzzles—one frame at a time.”

Boring holes into his eyes Remus said absorbedly, “So it’s quite difficult, is what you’re saying.”

“Extremely,” agreed Harry, “I’m really, really new to it—it took me awhile. I didn’t even know that’s what I was doing at first.”

“Is it the same way with feelings or emotions?” queried Lupin. Hagrid just seemed to be lost on the discussion and stood behind them quietly.

“Not hardly. People seem to...broadcast feelings in a way; they’re much easier to pick up. I also make it a point not to—‘go into’ someone’s head if I can help it—it seems utterly rude to do so,” Harry said with complete distaste. He shrugged and explained, “Almost all of what I pick up is peripheral; Ginny was different, but I still didn’t go anywhere in her head I didn’t need to. What’s the point in that?”

Nodding this time, Lupin answered, “You are indeed confirming my initial suspicions on what you have become in your present state. I could tell there was a certain—politeness to the way you shared my past memories with me. You weren’t invasive in the slightest degree, just insatiably curious...so I’m guessing I must have...let you into my thoughts?”

Harry lifted his brows, not really knowing how to answer. “I suppose that’s what you did, I really don’t know. Either way, erm, thanks for...letting me read your wavelengths,” said Harry, feeling distinctly stupid as he did so. He wondered if he would ever get used to the new things he could do.

They had at last reached the hallway on fifth floor, as the elevator dinged and they exited it. It was only then Harry realised it must have been enchanted size-wise, as Hagrid had fit in it without any problems whatsoever. They weren’t so lucky with the hallway, unfortunately. Harry held his wand out for the lighting, and since Hagrid couldn’t use a wand, Harry’s wand was their sole source of light.

The half-giant had to slide sideways through the corridor, as Lupin took over the responsibility of carrying Jamie. After having witnessed piled up people negotiating cramped passageways before—Harry remembered the Whomping Willow passage all too easily—he determined not to look at how badly his body was getting abused at this point. It was better he not know how many times his head or feet had nearly slammed into the wall.

Finally reaching the end door, they all spilled into the only slightly brighter lit room. Harry was filled with indescribable happiness at the sight of what greeted him. It turned out that all of his wonderful friends

had only made it as far as the tearoom before deciding they didn't want to leave yet.

Dear Readers,

Thanks very much for your reviews of course!) I really am glad for you who continue to acknowledge your following of my fic. I want you all to know that even though I don't have time to personally respond to each review, I do check each and every profile of those who put me on their alerts list or give me a review. I have a really awesome person listed...a formidable editor from England who does proofing of film/books/etc for a living. I was quite flattered to find I am being tagged by her. Also quite fun is that I have acquired a few Aussie readers lately, and I wanted to tell you all thank you! I would use names, but I don't have your permission...but thanks for all of your kind words... "QW" ;)

Then of course are my wonderful betas and proofers and best best friends from Mugglenet, without which accuracy and inspiration of writing this fic would not be possible. Your encouragement knows no bounds, nor does my gratitude for it. Thank you so much. And please... Enjoy! Love, Rae ;D

BREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAK

Everybody rushed Harry, Hagrid, and Lupin in the tearoom. A small spate of questioning from the teenagers followed, and Lupin essentially answered all the queries. Remus smiled softly and said to the rest of them in reference to Harry's twin, "Yes, he'll be okay. Needless to say, he's a little worse for wear—" then he looked at Harry meaningfully, and said, "—but I think we all know there's no doubt as to his powers of recuperation." Then the friends agreed and swiftly pointed out instances in Harry's past when he'd bounced back from other impossible feats. It reminded Harry a lot of the pre-D.A. meeting they all had at the Hog's Head last year.

The waves of relief that washed over those assembled were strong enough to last for quite awhile. It was clear everyone who had left the chamber with Dumbledore had been expecting the worst. Harry could hardly blame them, having assumed the same thing himself, and it was unendingly gratifying to inform his friends that was indeed not the case.

Lupin had placed Jamie, who was still sleeping, on a small couch while the rest of them caught each other up on the latest happenings. Harry's friends basically couldn't escape gravitating toward that couch, effectively providing a cover for any other guests who happened to be too curious. Apparently, it wasn't an unusual occurrence for larger groups of people to assemble in the tearoom.

Ginny quietly explained that she and the others had come to their senses after entering the tearoom, and refused to leave Harry behind while they all ate something, especially since Harry hadn't eaten anything for two weeks. The group had instead simply ordered hot chocolate at the counter from the witch, who was conspicuously absent at the moment. Harry's friends told him how it was hardly a sacrifice for them to go another couple hours to help him out, especially after they found out what Dumbledore had been planning since finding out Harry wasn't truly dead.

It was heartening to know the headmaster's silent manner in the chamber hadn't been one of shock at all. Rather, it was a persona Harry had seen Dumbledore assume only once before; one of complete and nearly overwhelming concentration. Since his friends couldn't show the adults without the use of Harry's wand, they had each pieced together what part of the poem and clues they could remember, along with what Justin, Michael, and Seamus had already written down. After seeing what they had been able to figure out, Dumbledore and Snape had looked at the piecemeal poem and practically jumped to action. The teenagers said it was as if the two men had discerned something that was hidden in the poem, and hadn't openly shared it with anyone yet. Lupin then asked to see the paper and had a very similar reaction, but declined to elaborate until Dumbledore's return.

It turned out the older professor had gone with Snape to the Ministry to procure some things, not the least of which was two cars for all of them to journey in. Portkey travel was scarcely something that Harry could do, or his body would be able to handle, and they all needed a comparably quick way to get back to the graveyard. That was where they were to meet back up with Seamus, Michael, and Justin, as well as everybody's parents. Ginny was almost bubbling over at the prospect she was going to see her entire family soon, as well as

meeting up with Hermione, who was doing decidedly better after finding out her best friend wasn't dead after all. Harry could hardly wait to see the Weasleys and Hermione again either.

Tonks had also temporarily left, but it was for a more subversive purpose. She was to free Madam Adonna from the solitary confinement section of the psychiatric ward. Harry demanded to know what in blue blazes the healer was doing in St. Mungo's psyche ward in the first place. Lupin then told Harry the true, singular, and most important reason behind the Ministry's completely ludicrous procedure of doing things after the authorities had the healer give her testimony.

Unfortunately, Harry's friends hadn't known the full story. It turned out the reason for the Ministry's about face regarding Harry's case was because Madam Adonna had boldly informed the court, in no uncertain terms, the person residing in his hospital bed was not the real Harry anymore. At the time, the healer was the only one who could unequivocally know that fact. Worse yet, no submissible way existed for Madam Adonna to prove it to anyone. The court had scarcely given her time enough to recover from the traumatic severing of the bond between she and Harry as well.

It would have looked worse if the Ministry's elite had openly declared Madam Adonna "crazy", so they just said her present "unprofessional" behaviour was due to residual effects of the Gemini Stasis Charm and thereby revoked her healer's license in lieu of incarceration. However, that was all before the seventh day of Harry's alleged stay in the Muggle hospital, when he had been pronounced legally dead.

Madam Adonna hadn't been acting irrational, violent, or untoward, but nobody would believe her vociferous and completely determined statements that Harry Potter, in fact, was not dead at all. As a result of the healer's refusal to keep silent, she had been assumed insane, declared a danger to herself and the public, and hospitalised in the very place where she had once been a highly sought-after employee.

Harry was still feeling horribly drained at this point, but he had the brave yet highly irrational impulse to barge straight down into the

psyche ward and demand Madam Adonna get released immediately. Although quite Slytherin in mind, Harry possessed a very Gryffindor soul that craved for action. He hated waiting. He hated waiting almost as much as he hated Voldemort, so that was saying something. Whoever was in charge of the solitary wing would have the shock of their life, seeing not one, but both supposedly dead Harrys in front of their very eyes. Hey, they may even have to be committed. Harry was just about to start into a good healthy round of ghostly pacing when the dumpy witch reentered the tearoom from the elevator. Everybody became silent rather quickly and stared curiously at her.

She was moving around in a most peculiar manner; a rather pantomime type fashion. It was almost like she was pulling something invisible behind her. Abandoning her unseeable charge fairly close to the group, she marched straight up to Lupin and proceeded to transfigure into Nymphadora Tonks.

“Wotcher, Harry,” she said distractedly and continued to Remus, “Professor, we have a problem,” in a very tight-lipped manner. Harry had never seen the young Auror act like this.

“How do you mean?” asked Lupin quietly as Tonks pulled him over to where she had left the invisible thing next to a small table. The pair stood in front of it as Tonks made a sweeping motion and said apologetically, “I know we’re supposed to leave soon, but....”

Lupin pulled back in astonishment, hurriedly glanced at the Auror and said with subdued intensity, “Are you sure this is—”

“I am quite certain, one adult Metamorph usually knows another,” clipped Tonks irritably, “we’re also related, and I’ve been scoping this place out for three days now—”

“Of course you are,” Remus amended diffidently, “I didn’t mean that how it sounded. Can we do anything?”

“I can tell you we need both of him,” Tonks answered and looked at Harry significantly, “and we also need to get out of this public area. But first, we just need to hear her talk,” and Tonks pointed back to the unseen individual they were discussing. Hagrid exchanged looks with

Lupin and nodded, unspoken agreement that the half-giant stay behind to guard Jamie and the others.

Harry was feeling the same open interest his friends were, and oddly enough he couldn't sense much more than grim determination from the adults at the moment. The teenagers' prying questions were gently explained away as Harry followed Lupin and Tonks back into the stuffy little corridor with the invisible someone in tow.

Lupin shut the door, they each lit their wands, and Tonks removed what was obviously an Invisibility Cloak from around the mysterious person.

Yet another form of paralytic shock washed over Harry as he, once again, stared back into the image of his own face. Something had obviously gone wrong with Madam Adonna but this...this was an atrocity that defied description or comprehension.

"Now we know why they were so radical about shutting everything down," Remus said with complete revulsion, "and why the media wasn't allowed to take pictures or report anything about the trial after they prematurely severed the Charm. The public seeing her look like this would have caused riots at the Ministry building."

"It gets worse than that," Tonks replied disgustedly, "why don't you ask her about it?"

Harry could see that something was clearly out-of-sorts with the healer, barring the fact she literally looked like his twin. She hadn't moved by herself at all, her face was waxen like a doll's, and her grey eyes were glazed over and staring vacantly ahead. The apparent catatonia went much deeper than that, however. When he concentrated, Harry could at least sense some sort of psychic buzz emanating from the minds of those around him. The healer conversely, was a complete blank. It wasn't anything dementor-like, but the lack of mental activity in one Harry knew had to be so strong was almost terrifying. Surreality notwithstanding, a distinct personality was still supposed to be inside somewhere, regardless of what she looked like externally.

“What is wrong with her?” Harry punctuated, concern for her mind easily overriding his initial reaction of her appearance. Having visited St. Mungo’s before, Harry had seen some rather spectacular magical disfigurements and got over this one surprisingly quickly.

“Oh, I’m sure they force-fed her some nice sedative potions for compliance. It’s what they usually do to people who are prescribed solitary confinement,” Remus answered Harry dourly.

Taking and applying Lupin’s prior example with Jamie, Harry asked the healer directly, “Do you know who you are?” He had to know she wasn’t totally gone...not after all she had managed to pull through.

“I am Healer Madam Adonna Danekkah Tonks,” she responded mechanically, with Harry’s voice. The dull, recitative way she said it could only mean one thing.

Remus deduced the same immediately, as he said to Madam, “So they made you take—“

“Veritaserum.”

All three of them said the word together with her, in varying degrees of abhorrence. “Copious amounts, for the last three days,” the healer went on, slurring the words.

“Copious amounts of Veritaserum? But isn’t that—“

“Deadly,” confirmed Madam Adonna.

She tilted backward and began slowly sliding down the wall to the floor. Her actions underlaid the gravity of the word she had just used. Now painfully evident was the fact Harry’s counterpart hadn’t been the only innocent victim totally stripped of defences because of who he was or what he knew. Unfortunately, the healer just appeared to have outlived her usefulness a bit sooner than Harry had.

“Is there an antidote?” Tonks asked intently, crouching next to Adonna on the floor. The Auror pushed back the raven waves of hair

that had fallen across the sides of Madam's altered face as she had fallen.

"Yes. It's just been...rediscovered. Almost no one knows of it... because it was believed to be a myth. Liberabiotic is not a true antidote...but it does counteract the worst...of the depressive effects of...Veritasium on the nervous system. It's nearly...impossible to make and harder...to come by." The healer continued to speak, though haltingly, as the three of them tried desperately to use her formidable medical knowledge to help save her.

"How much of it do you need?" Lupin was more driven than ever at this last bit of information.

"Three standard vials...equal amounts...each administered exactly two minutes apart." The sheen across Madam's face began to stand out even more under the odd-coloured light of their wands.

"Hold that thought," Lupin told the rest of them, and dashed out of the corridor. "I'll be right back."

Then Madam slumped forward across her knees. Harry looked over at Tonks as she conjured a cold compress and said, "That's how Adonna was when I found her."

Sliding the cloth in between the healer's forehead and knees, Tonks explained, "I asked her a bit...she told me how she fought the serum but finally couldn't help giving in to its influence. It's obvious whoever did this either had no idea what they were doing to her or didn't care what would happen if they did it."

A bolt of guilt pierced Harry as he replied, "And this all happened because she tried to help me."

"Don't kid yourself, Harry." The young woman snapped her head in his direction and went on sternly, "this happened because of Voldemort and the Ministry. You don't know this, but the G.S. Charm turns into a curse when the ones under it aren't allowed to wake up properly by themselves. The stasis part of the charm does what it's supposed to, only on the wrong person. That's why she still looks like

you and can't morph back—it was an abrupt severing, not a clean split. Her ability to transfigure lies somewhere inside of you or your counterpart.”

Harry was about to ask Tonks if any way existed for him to transfer the healer's morphing talent back into Madam, when Lupin swiftly entered the hallway again, Snape's case of potions in hand.

Remus looked meaningfully at Harry and said, “Our mysterious Slytherin benefactor has struck again, Harry. It just so happens that four phials of the elusive Liberabitionic Potion just happen to be right in here,” he said with satisfaction, opening up the case and dropping next to Adonna and Tonks on the floor.

The pair from the Order administered the first dose of potion to the healer. Tonks continued to cool Madam Adonna's forehead and neck with the cloth. As the antidote ran its course, the trio was forced to sit back and do the one thing most required and loathed. They waited.

Dear Readers,

Hello fellow lovers of ooey gooey chewy fanficcy goodness! As I sit here and contemplate what the world I need to post for author's notes at the beginning of the chapter, it occurs to me it is nearly 2 am my time. No wonder I'm a wee bit knackered in the noggin. Not that I sleep much anyway, mind you...

One thing I keep forgetting to tell you is that I also do illustrations for my fic. You can find them at deviantartcom under the name rbj-carson. I don't have too many posted, but I hope you'll enjoy my work, and don't forget to check out the scraps page either. There's an awesome one based on Chapter 14.

I should tell you that "Veritas vos Liberabit" (name of last chapter) is a Latin phrase that translates to "In truth is liberty", or corollary "Truth will set you free."

Chapter 18 is another differently-flavoured chapter...can't keep things the same, so taste the rainbow...XD. Pay very, very close attention to as you read this. Some blatant hints are given if you know where to look. You will HAVE to go back and read some passages again to pick up on the clues, that is for sure and certain. CONSTANT VIGILANCE! (bangs off the wall) Uhhhh...I really should try and sleep...Enjoy! Love, Rae)

BREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAK

Round about the halfway mark between the second and third doses of potion, Harry sensed a very buried type of awakening within Madam Adonna's mind. The best way to describe it would be the feeling one gets when they're out of the room yet can detect a television set get switched on anyway, even when the sound is turned down. Intuitively, he knew it wasn't something anyone without his newfound abilities would be able to divine. Harry stood there and quietly concentrated whilst catching snippets of conversation between Tonks and Lupin.

At the young Auror's prompting, Remus had explained to her about Snape's miraculous travelling satchel, which seemed to

spontaneously produce whatever was needed whenever they needed it. They also spoke of the crowns, the altered Dark Mark, and the poem. That was when Lupin pulled out the piece of paper from his robes and showed Tonks the one clue that had so far eluded the youth.

Harry was so deep into absorption at this point, he only caught the tail end of what Remus had been saying, but Tonks had missed what Lupin was telling her, too. Then the former professor took his wand, highlighted just the left-most column of letters down the stanzas of the poem and whispered, "I think we know both who sent this and who the decoy was. It makes perfect sense when combined with the crowns and the duplicate name on the documents." Tonks gasped slightly and replied, "Another who was believed long dead...I supposed he'd just outlived his usefulness as well?" she inquired icily.

Wanting to hear more, Harry instead heard them end that line of conversation and administer the final dose of potion to the healer. Although very gradual, it was indeed having the desired effect for Adonna, though most of her recovery was internal. The healer's intellect still seemed to be very lost inside, as her previously-injured mental functions had fled under the poisonous affectations of the Veritaserum. Harry determined to give her something to anchor to. He imagined himself standing in the swirling mists of her thoughts and emanated all the positive energy he could muster, sending with the feeling this message: You can trust me, please follow me.

"Yes," said Tonks, "I also understand how the poem hinted at how to find Harry. But about him being alive in the past...what do you suppose that is all about?"

The healer's consciousness wasn't using words, but Harry still felt her answer his call...and he could tell she had caught up with and found him. Like a person lost too long in a desert, Adonna soaked up the oasis of goodwill he sent her. She had also been yearning for somebody, anybody she could trust; especially after having been violated of both mind and body for such a sustained amount of time.

"I wager that is something only Fate herself can decide," Lupin went on vaguely, "but I suspect it has a lot more to do with the lunar

eclipse tonight than moonrise, as it were. And I would know how powerful that type of magic can be—it's the reason why I'm still able to stay human right now, when normally I'd be sleeping peacefully with a good healthy serving of Snape's potion. We'll be cutting it close as it is."

The flare of renewed hope Harry had received from Madam Adonna was so strong, it nearly overwhelmed them both. That was even before she had fully recognised who had found her, however. A loud and joyous, I KNEW IT! pushed away the remaining foggiess around them, and Adonna nearly fell at his feet in relief. At that moment, Harry found out the final reprehensible actions against the healer had caused her, a known professional, to question her own sanity.

Yet she had pressed on for Harry anyway, at the cost of everything she possessed, all in the name of his preservation. It was only right that he attempt to return such a matchless favour. By way of thank you, he gave her a fierce mental embrace that she returned, level of comprehension well beyond words by this point. She then let go and Harry found he was back inside his own mind again.

"The eclipse is precisely the level of magic we need to reverse the G.S. Charm affects, too," Madam Adonna said airily, just above a whisper. She startled Remus and the young Auror.

"Adonna?" Tonks turned toward her, voice full of trepidation.

"Not exactly feeling like myself at the moment," the healer smiled weakly and continued, "but yes. That would be me."

"You're okay!" exclaimed Tonks, enveloping Madam in an enthusiastic hug. Remus let out a slow sigh of relief and said simply, "Welcome back, Healer. I'm Remus Lupin, by the way."

"Incidentally Mr. Lupin, you have my thanks," replied Adonna. "Plus there is a time for formalities, and this hardly seems like one." Her voice was gaining a bit more in strength and she said, "Please, call me 'Don' or 'Donnie.' It's what I usually go by in consideration of a masculine host persona. The whole 'Madam Adonna' bit just doesn't seem to apply," she said wryly and paused. Sustained speaking was

still clearly taking quite an effort for her. “Nymphadora can explain more to you...it’s a distinctly Metamorph thing.”

The Auror smirked and said to her, “On the floor like that, and still you feed me cheek on my name.” Shaking her head, Tonks went on, “Donnie is my cousin. She was like the big sister I never had. From a very early age—I’m told it was because she overheard her father say he wanted a boy instead of a girl—Donnie learned that it was her particular gift to transfigure into forms of the opposite gender. Even with some Metamorphmagi, that is considered taboo, but then again Donnie was never one to be conventional. I was envious of her talent, her names that she could easily adapt to fit whatever persona she was wearing—unlike ‘Nymphadora,’” Tonks rolled her eyes, “so naturally she was sort of hero-worshipped by me.” Then she glared at the healer and said nastily, “I will never forgive you for the time you tricked me into thinking you were my father.”

Tonks looked at Harry and Remus and ended, “Grounded me for two months, she did. I could have died!”

Lupin laughed and Harry just marvelled that Madam Adonna, the illustrious healer who commanded such an aura of rules and respect, remained of all things, a true maverick at heart. She was taking all of this in such stride, but Harry still couldn’t help the dismay he felt at seeing her look the way she did...locked in permanent stasis...forever sporting the visage of the last person she thought she hadn’t saved. Damn Voldemort, damn Fudge, damn the Ministry—what they’d condemned Adonna to was beyond sickening. Damn them all. At the moment, the healer was also studying Harry very closely.

“Thanks very much to you too, Mr. Potter. I appreciate you for drawing me back just then. I wasn’t sure if I could come back. I definitely needed it,” she said to him softly.

What Harry meant to say was, “You’re so welcome, and please call me Harry.” But what came out instead was, “I’m so sorry...” he trailed off, mentally finishing up with you’ve had to look like me.

Adonna picked up on his despair and immediately reassured him, “In my line of work, I’ve had to accept certain risks. Although not exactly commonplace, the G.S. Charm is something I’ve done before; I knew full well what I was getting into.” The healer closed her eyes a bit and took a few deep breaths, the antidote still doing its work.

Then the corner of her mouth quirked and she continued, “Consequently, this image I’ve got on loan from you isn’t bad at all, Mr. Potter. I’ve looked much worse before, for people who were decidedly less than thankful, believe me. I’ve never been one to reserve my talents or skills for assisting someone based on rules of societal propriety—that’s selfish and stupid. Lives get lost that way. The next person in line who needed my help just happened to be you,” she said encouragingly. “And don’t worry—if we had a chance to repeat this, I’d do the same thing all over again.”

Tonks told Adonna smugly, “I hardly think you’ve had the privilege to wear the image of someone even half as famous or fit as our Mr. Potter.”

Harry felt a snort of disbelief die somewhere in the back of his throat. The Auror must be mental or blind. Mr. Potter, ‘fit’? That was a term girls used to describe a particularly attractive person of the male gender.

Adonna swept a hand over herself and said in mock self-deprecation, “What, this old thing?” echoing Harry’s thoughts to a tee. But then the healer narrowed her eyes and went on to Tonks, “Cheeky girl. These good looks I could get used to. It’s the fame that annoys me. Thankfully, it was easy to avoid at first because of the longer hair and not wearing glasses. Then word spread of his previously unknown morphing talent. If I had a galleon for each time somebody approached me for an autograph or a photo op...” an exasperated groan escaped her, in Harry’s tone of voice. “Honestly Mr. Potter, repelling that rubbish must be a magical power all its own.”

Harry held a hand to his mouth, sniggering and blushing madly. How many times had he thought or said the exact same thing, the exact same way? Considering what Adonna looked like as of late, she literally had to have lived the ecstatic altruism of “Potter Fandom”. It

was singularly unique having someone describe a rather dubious highlight of his life to him in such a hilarious fashion. Once again, Harry had been teased completely without realising it.

“Finally, a breakthrough,” said Tonks happily, quite pleased with Harry’s reaction. “We told you she could handle it.” Remus merely smirked and raised an eyebrow.

“That you did,” Harry replied to the young woman, then he turned to the healer and said, “and Donnie...please call me Harry. I feel like I’m at school when people call me Mr. Potter.”

These two women were not only extraordinary in morphing talent but extraordinary people as well. Strange? Yes. But not anymore strange than anything else he’d learned about the wizard world. It was fascinating to think he actually had a magical ability in common with them now, though Harry seriously doubted he would ever explore such extremes as Tonks or Adonna had. Nope, hair and facial features was about the limit for his transfiguration.

Remus said, “Shall we help you off the floor now?” and reached out to assist Adonna. She shook her head slightly and replied, “If we can, I need as long as possible to just stay down and regain strength. I assume those in solitary will have noticed my absence close to now, so carrying me out of here would not be good—as far as they know, I’m still dying because of the venom. So it’s walking out of here, or nothing.”

“You called the truth serum ‘venom?’” Harry inquired. He wanted to know if it was more than just a slip of the tongue.

Adonna turned toward him and answered, “Yes. I apologise, some things are slipping my mind at the moment and I forget whom I’m addressing. The most potent ingredient in Veritaserum is basilisk venom. That’s why it only takes three drops to render a full confession from somebody. Being bitten and injected that way is a much quicker route to go than ingesting a watered-down version of it. I think you’re the only one I’m aware of who knows what that feels like firsthand, Harry.”

He certainly did know how that felt—Harry had screamed when the basilisk punctured his arm. The effects of its venom were a hundred times worse, though. It was horrible and painful, and it made him fevered and so very sick. Had it not been for Fawkes, Harry's experience with basilisk bites would have been mercifully short—somewhere in the neighbourhood of three minutes—from being bitten to biting the dust. Adonna however, had been forced to swallow ungodly amounts of the truth serum, her entire insides being under constant saturation of that vile liquid. And she had fought it for three days—Harry could only imagine what that was like. It also explained the deathly fevered sheen across her face that was only now starting to subside. In fact, the only thing Harry knew of that could cure poisoning of such magnitude was—

“Phoenix tears!” he exclaimed to Adonna, based on a flash of inspiration. “That’s what’s in Liberabitoic, isn’t it? That’s why it was thought a myth—why it’s so rare and impossible to make!”

Madam gave him a genuine, if tired smile and replied, “Bravo, Harry. Petrified phoenix tears, actually...not nearly as powerful as live fallen tears, but they can still be used for healing. Most people mistake them for crystals or dewgems when they’re found, because that’s what they resemble.”

Harry didn’t have to think twice about which phoenix had produced the tears for this particular Liberabitoic. If Snape had been making the stuff recently, only one answer remained. Fawkes, however inadvertently had come through at the last moment to save someone’s life again. And the fact the bird’s tears were used to combat basilisk venom...it was delicious irony.

Adonna gazed at him for a bit and said, “With your insight and ingenuity, I might make a healer of you yet. I’ve never seen anyone your age with ability to accomplish such extraordinary feats by non-magical means. What you did with your wand and fashioning that sling with your shirt was nothing short of phenomenal. I’ve seen wizards with five times your education and experience get flummoxed in similar situations, all because they didn’t have magic.” She lifted her eyebrows and continued, “With your keen and powerful mind, you’ve definitely got the disposition for medicinal arts.”

Harry a Healer? That was definitely an interesting prospect. He'd always assumed the only thing he might ever have a future in was something involving dark arts defence. Having thought Hermione was more suited to the memorization a healer's education must entail, it wasn't even something Harry had even remotely considered. But who better than an expert to deem he had requisites to that particular career path?

"Donnie," said Lupin, "I am most interested as to why you were given Veritaserum after the trial instead of during. Did they not believe who you were in the courtroom?"

Adonna's jaw tightened and she got a dark look about her. "No, the Ministry knew full well who I was when they brought me to court. The Gemini Stasis Charm effects do linger but it's only a matter of hours before they finally wear off. That's what Fudge told everybody was up with me—that I still looked like Harry because the charm had yet to subside. In actuality, most people in that courtroom didn't even know the charm had been forcefully severed rather than ending naturally."

"How could they know it was you, besides the fact you act differently?" Lupin was clearly intrigued.

This was something Harry couldn't help but noticing immediately as he'd knelt next to Adonna. He held his wand out and said, "Beg your pardon," and swept back her curtain of black hair to one side with it. "She has no scar, Remus," Harry stated plainly. The healer half-smiled at him again.

"Excellent skills of observation, Harry. Yes, physical ways exist of telling a Metamorphmagus apart from the real person. You just have to know how to look for them," said Adonna.

Tonks threw in, "Typically, when Metamorphs use complete transfiguration, it's only for a few minutes or hours at most. If it's for entire days, it tends to get rather tiresome and smaller details start to slip. One of the tells is that any visible curse marking or magical effect begins to wear off, if not directly put on the Metamorph in question. Fingerprints also start to return to what they're supposed to look like."

“Normally yes, but the charm took care of that for me. The only physical differences would be eye colour and the scar,” Adonna clarified. “It’s one of the most powerful types of charms anyone can evoke—connecting one’s self to another person—things tend to get shifted or scrambled when it’s not carried out properly. That’s why I know things about your past that you’ve never told me, Harry. It’s also why I can read things from people right now, when usually I’d need my wand to divine someone’s mental state or read thoughts from them.”

Another realisation came to Harry with the force of a freight train and he said amazedly, “You’re not just a healer, are you? You’re also an empath, or a telepath. I can do the same things now—but I can block emotions from other people too, if I have to. Can you not...do that...anymore?” It was disconcerting to think Madam had lost another ability due to the charm.

Shaking her head Adonna replied, “Block other’s feelings? Not very well, no. Some of the disciplines I’ve studied appear to have copied themselves to you, others just shifted entirely. Most of it was intentional and by me, I might add.” Then she looked at Tonks and Lupin and told them, “I realise most of what I’m about to say will confuse you two but I need to tell Harry these things.”

The healer turned back to Harry and went on, “I remember seeing your parents and the Fright Bus. I was there with you, as a silent observer. I just couldn’t reveal myself, because...You-Know-Who was influencing your thoughts. What you need to realise is that was not a true reality, Harry.” He stared at her, lost in thought that the Lily and James he had seen weren’t real at all.

“It wasn’t a nightmare either, however. The people you saw were merely apparitions...images that were used to convince you that you were truly dead.” Adonna looked at him even more meaningfully, saying, “Think about it, Harry. What are the worst things You-Know-Who would use against you? Your parents—you never even questioned your death when they told you that was what happened. I know from personal observation that dying is never something Harry

Potter takes to without a fearsome fight.” Gaping at the healer, Harry struggled to comprehend all she was revealing to him.

“Worse still, your parents didn’t seem to care that you were dead. Another thing was influencing you in your mind as well...it manifested itself in the form of that yellow gift box. Somebody was trying to tell you something...get through and let you know what you were being subjected to wasn’t reality. But it still wasn’t enough—the car wreck had done a number on you—it wasn’t something you could fight alone. So You-Know-Who again warped what you saw. The only thing was your name on the certs. Then he did another last-ditch effort to not only convince you of your death, but that you were a son of evil, just like he is.”

“Wait,” interrupted Remus, “are you saying that Harry knew about the gift box and adoption certs before Ginny told him, because he saw them...while in a coma?”

“Donnie, how can you possibly know all this? Voldemort can’t have touched your mind before,” Tonks said disbelievingly at the same time.

But Harry whispered to the healer, as if the other two hadn’t even spoken, “His wand! Voldemort had his image of my father...give me that wand...so I would believe I was just the same as...him.”

Everyone stared at the Madam in shock. “Precisely,” answered Adonna with furious intensity. “And to answer your question, Tonks...I didn’t know it was You-Know-Who.... Not until after his first attempt to break the G. S. Charm, which was when—”

“When I summoned the Fright Bus with his wand,” breathed Harry, everything becoming clearer to him by the minute.

“Yes, Harry. Then I saw into his mind. It was just a brief flash, but I knew the things he was going to do. I knew he was going to have dementors go after you, so I did the last thing I could. I poured what knowledge I had, with what time I had to your mind. I added to your rudimentary working of Occlumency, Legilimency, empathic abilities,

Omnilumency...anything to help your soul stay together and not disperse upon the split from your body.”

“So...you were the one who...had me speed learn all these things I can do now...the thought reading, everything....” he trailed off.

Adonna picked up, “No, not everything. It couldn’t have happened if your latent abilities weren’t already there, either. You just...happened to take a bit more than was intended is all—because of the charm severing. But you had to leave your body willingly. It wasn’t something anybody could force you to do.”

“Therefore you...” Harry narrowed his eyes at her, “...you had to scare me, didn’t you? You placed yourself on the Fright Bus, so I would find you. But you weren’t really trying to hurt me. You weren’t yelling at me, either. It was Voldemort, wasn’t it? You were telling him to leave me alone.”

She got a profoundly saddened look in her eyes and replied, “Yes again. You’re a very stubborn person, Harry. Making you leave that bus was indicative of you leaving the influence of You-Know-Who, as well as your body. It was the only way either of you or your counterpart would have a chance.”

“And that’s when you nearly went mad...” Harry said the last bit gruffly.

“Harry, not at all. I had to make it convincing...You-Know-Who couldn’t know that I wasn’t insane when I used my wand against you. He had to believe that I didn’t know what I was doing. That’s one thing you need to learn about thought gathering. People’s thoughts only read as true as long as they believe it to be true. That doesn’t necessarily mean what they know is the entire truth.”

Remus had just about had enough of being silent and spoke up in a knowing voice, “All of the knowledge he has because of you...it helped him to become even more powerful didn’t it? Powerful enough to practise Psychromancy.”

“Practise what?” asked Harry and Tonks in unison.

Somebody rapped on the hallway door. Remus opened it and Dumbledore stepped through, looked over his half-moon glasses and replied, "You're a Psychromancer now, Harry. The most powerful one ever known. Now if you're willing to listen, I shall help the healer expound upon the definition."

Dear Readers,

Let me just say, Holy freakin honkin reviews! Thank you sooo sooo much...the response to my call was...astounding! And to let you know, Miss Scarhead, I really wasn't trying to make you feel guilty...I quite appreciate the fact you've been with this fic since the beginning, all those months ago. I specifically stated the footnote was "for those of you who don't know how to review"...lol...you obviously do. ;D And please don't stop leaving them...they help people like me more than you can even know. I quite literally live for writing.

As I much prefer to have the characters learn/explain things through interaction and dialogue, I will fail to outright elaborate on descriptions of terms in my fic. I will also tell you "Psychromancy" is not anything that anyone should be able to look up, as it was created by me. "Omniumency" is also something else I created.

I needed another bridge-the-gap chapter before full-on explanations (which will be in the next chapter, I assure you), as Dumbledore could hardly hang around in the corridor while the clock is ticking and the search for Madam Adonna/as Harry is on.

Please give me some time for the next chapter, as I am currently fighting a nasty bout of flu which is on the brink of pneumonia...meh... Hope you all enjoy this chapter...it was, as usual, immensely fun to write. Love, Rae ;)

BREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAK

"Before I elaborate however, I do have some items to disperse amongst you," Dumbledore continued as he made his way over to Harry and Adonna. The professor handed over a toned-down boys' Hogwarts uniform to Adonna minus the tie and robes, for "when they leave." He also gave her a long crimson-coloured wand. The healer's eyes lit up and she reached out delicately for the object saying, "My wand! When Ministry took it at trial, I wasn't sure I'd ever see it again...." as she reverently inspected it. "How did you get it, Professor?" she inquired incredulously.

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled mischievously as he said, "The mysterious power of persuasion, Donnie. Suffice it to say, someone saw fit to release some misbegotten items back to their rightful owners, via yours truly."

Then he turned toward Harry saying, "It's also how we got your clothes, Harry. Ministry was holding your entire lot of property as 'evidence'. The operative word being 'was,' of course," the older man said with a wry look on his face.

"Yeah, I was seriously beginning to wonder where everybody was getting my clothes...." Harry replied skeptically.

"This does bring back memories though," said Adonna softly, looking at Harry's uniform.

"I take it you used to be a Hogwarts student then?" asked Lupin.

"Yes, but it's something more than that..." the healer answered, giving Dumbledore a significant look.

The headmaster gave a small smile and explained, "Miss Donnie Tonks, the only student in Hogwarts history to stage a great 'trouser caper'. She and her female friends raided the laundry and stole all the boys trousers they could find, and wore them to class the next week. The only pairs not nicked were the ones already in the dormitories. What, pray tell, would cause such an otherwise respectable group of young ladies to behave in such a fashion?" He turned toward Adonna on the floor, who was trying not to blush as well as keep a straight face.

"It was in protest because wearing girls' uniforms in the dungeons was freezing cold! Plus, I just hated skirts...." she said, holding out her hands helplessly. "You do stupid things when you're young," she mumbled. They all laughed with the hapless healer and the elder professor turned toward Harry and pulled out something from under his robes.

"I heard you were having trouble with visibility dispersal and passing through things, so I managed to get ahold of this for you," he said. He

was holding up a beautiful shimmering white gossamer cloak, which resembled the black one Harry inherited from James.

Tonks appeared to have recognised it immediately, as she whistled and said, "Ghost Net! They let you have one?" she was clearly impressed.

"What's 'Ghost Net'?" Harry inquired, very intrigued.

"Think of it as a 'Disinvisibility Cloak'. It operates on similar magic principles as Invisibility Cloaks, just in reverse. It's also only effective on spirits. Instead of using gravity to pull it down, it repulses off the ionic static surrounding ghosts," said Dumbledore.

"It's what we Aurors use to catch dangerous Poltergeists," Tonks went on, "gives us something to hold onto, instead of trying to remove them the hard way. Ghost Net is so rare only three cloaks exist, and the Ministry keeps close watch over them all. Just imagine that stuff in the hands of a nasty ghost...." the Auror shook her head. "I'm sure the professor has removed the Seize Jinx from it, though."

"The what?" Harry replied warily. He had just been about to step into the special cloak when he leaped away reactively instead.

"It sort of turns into a straightjacket because of that charm, but I'm sure you have nothing to worry about. After all, Dumbledore got it to help you, not to hurt you."

Still more than a bit cautious, Harry backed up into the gossamer fabric that the headmaster was holding out for him. He could tell the thing was actually covering him, almost the way real clothes felt. Thankfully, it wasn't grabbing him or anything, like a Seize Jinx would have caused it to. Someone then stood behind him and...rested their hands on his shoulders. He started in astonishment. "Are you actually..." he looked down at Tonks's hands on the cloak, "you are! That's not...I'm not making you freeze?"

The young woman smiled quirkily and shook her head. "The miracle of Ghost Net. Now if you think that's cool, just try these on," she reached back as Dumbledore handed her something. Harry turned

back around and the Auror held out some matching gloves for him to wear. "Can't have troublesome ghosts vanishing their hands now, can we?" Sliding the gloves on, Harry turned his face back up to Tonks as she held out her palm and said, "Now slap me five."

Harry just shook his head once, drew back his gloved hand and...slapped the Auror's hand without having to concentrate, but most importantly without making her shiver with cold.

"Good show!" Remus observed, thunderstruck.

"This stuff is amazing!" exclaimed Harry.

"It sure is," Adonna agreed, and then she turned to address Dumbledore. "Professor, how did you know I would need these particular clothes? I vaguely remember Tonks telling me you sent her to spy here three days ago, but from what I can tell, even she didn't know I still looked like Harry. How did you know I was...not me?" The healer looked askance, even by her own question.

The professor reached into his robes again and pulled out a rather battered piece of newsprint. On the very front page of The Quibbler screamed the headline, IMPOSTER POTTER PSYCHES PUBLIC? Underneath it was a picture of a defiant-looking Harry standing in the main foyer at the Ministry building. "I'm telling you," shouted his picture-image to the surrounding people, "Harry Potter is not dead!" Adonna gasped and said, "That's me! I didn't know anybody got a picture... After the Wizard Wireless announcement, I didn't know where else to go..." she said in dismay, as she recalled the events of the past. Harry knelt next to her again and read the story.

Ministry of Magic, LONDON by Rita Skeeter

Just hours following the devastating announcement of the death of Harry Potter, this unidentified person was spotted in the Ministry building. Whomever it was caught instant attention, as anyone who happened by was mesmerised by the sight of the Boy-Who-Once-Lived. Ministry officials quickly apprehended the individual and made the hasty yet unsatisfyingly

vague pronouncement this “sort of thing happens all the time when important celebrities or officials die.”

It is this reporter’s belief that all Ministry’s press releases and declarations concerning anything to do with Harry Potter or his case have been a complete farce, designed to throw everyone off and distract them from the actual truth. The person at Ministry never once claimed to be him, only that he wasn’t actually dead. A conspiracy theory is the only possible explanation...

The article went on to expound upon three rather stunning conspiracy theories, each more unbelievable than the next. It was rather obvious the story’s introductory author didn’t write the theories, however. But the overall gist contained in the header was indeed true...Rita Skeeter had actually published the truth concerning him again. The biggest problem was that it was still printed in The Quibbler.

“Most people thought it a sick joke for Skeeter to say what she did about Harry’s death, at least firstwise. Regardless, I noticed something with that picture,” explained Dumbledore.

They all looked at the moving snapshot together and said simultaneously, “No scar.”

The professor looked right at Adonna and said, “I knew nobody trying to properly impersonate him would make such a glaring oversight, so I played a hunch. And here you are. Even before finding out the full truth about Harry, we were already going to free you tonight, Donnie. I knew what you were being subjected to could hardly be good. I only regret it couldn’t be sooner.”

The headmaster looked at her very kindly and placed a hand on her forehead. It was a gesture Harry had experienced from Dumbledore many times, and it served as a reminder the headmaster always tried to watch out for those once under his tutelage.

“I know I promised you an explanation for Psychromancy, Harry. It will come, but the fact remains we really must depart. We are going to

leave in three shifts so as to avoid attracting attention; Kingsley will be escorting Neville, Dean, Susan, and Luna, I will be accompanying Hagrid, your double, and Ginny, and the four of you are to leave last. I suggest you keep your heads covered at all times, Harry and Donnie; the last thing you want to do is attract attention to your faces. So here is another cloak for you," he produced a dark grey cloak and gave it to the healer, "as we do need the Invisibility Cloak for Harry's counterpart," and he took the black drape from Tonks, who had slung it over her shoulder. "Donnie might be able to walk out of here, but I know Harry's double can't. Also, I doubt I need to remind you to take the stairs," ended the professor.

"Yeah, we know our jobs," Tonks responded, a titch irritatedly. "I assume the cars will be circling the block, since parking them could attract Muggle attention," she said, as the elder man nodded. "So leave already, she needs to change," the young woman went on, pointing to Adonna. Tonks was quite clearly back in full "Auror" mode again. It appeared mild annoyance while fully focusing on one's tasks was a family trait.

Harry noticed the tearoom witch was back at her counter again as he exited the hallway with Dumbledore and Lupin. Remus turned to the older man and inquired, "Where's Moody and Snape, Professor?"

"Moody is indisposed at the moment. Severus is currently on assignment, dealing with most pressing concerns of a time-sensitive nature. Suffice it to say they will both be meeting us in the graveyard at the appointed time." And that was that.

Remus threw Harry a slightly surprised glance, evidently as taken aback as he was that Dumbledore's answer had been short and left absolutely no room for discussion. Harry tried to read any thoughts from Dumbledore but as he did, he became aware the headmaster's mental discipline and power ran at a much deeper level than anyone else he had come across thus far. Dumbledore exuded that calm assurance and it was clear the man would never accidentally leave a peripheral thought for anyone to read. Harry didn't even know what it was he was sensing from Dumbledore, but it felt very ancient, time-honoured, and...huge. No other word remained for it. The professor's

power was all-encompassing in nature. Small wonder Voldemort was scared of him.

The first shift of people had already left so Hagrid, Jamie, and Ginny were the only ones remaining. Jamie was still down and out, and Lupin helped Hagrid slide the Invisibility Cloak over him. Dumbledore said, "I hardly think I need to tell you to act like you're not carrying anyone, Hagrid."

The half-giant replied with mild indignation, "It's no' like he weighs a lo' anyway, Professor. Besides, wha' good's a hal' giant who can't do a lil' haulin'?" And then he smiled widely at the rest of them, evidently quite pleased with his task of 'Harry-bearing.' They couldn't help but smile back at him.

Ginny looked at Harry's new cloak and asked, "What is that?" She was clearly dazzled by it.

Harry grinned and replied, "Ghost Net. Here, let me show you," and he reached out and trailed a gloved finger down Ginny's cheek. She gasped and said, "Brilliant! You didn't even freeze me! I wonder..." then she reached out and grasped his arm. "Bloody hell! I can touch you, too!" Ginny was positively exuberant, and Harry grinned even more broadly at her reaction.

"Miss Weasley, we must depart now. We'll meet you all on the street below," Dumbledore assured, "give us ten minutes, Remus. Then the rest of you take your leave," he finished as he walked with Hagrid and Ginny to the stairwell door entrance. The red-haired girl gave Harry a final "see you later" as the door shut on them.

Lupin was just about to tell the women in the corridor it was nearing time to leave when the door opened and they walked out, Adonna leaning heavily against Tonks. Remus instantly took up the other side of the healer to balance out her unsteady gait. "So this is where we are..." said the healer, looking around at the tearoom, "I was wondering." When they got to the stairwell, Adonna looked down at the steps in utter alarm.

"Oh no...ten flights, how could I have forgotten?" she said disparagingly.

"Nobody's going to begrudge you some major assistance," Remus told her caringly, "especially not considering what you've been through as of late. Please, allow me the honour?" He reached out his arms for her again as she considered, nodded, and finally slung an arm around his shoulders and he picked her up.

"It's okay Donnie, Lupin is really strong...he's not your average human being. Besides," added Tonks, "it's not really that critical you need to walk until we get to the main floor."

Harry could tell it was really hard for the healer to accept such help, but she wasn't too proud to realise they all really needed to get the hell out of St. Mungo's. Setting Adonna down, Remus and Tonks gave she and Harry the once-over, making absolutely certain their charges' faces were concealed. Harry also made it a point to keep staring down at the floor so as not to attract attention.

It was odd; he had spent time as a ghost under the assumption that he could still function like a normal human being. Now that he had some semblance of corporeal nature back due to the special cloak, he still feared he could mess it all up somehow. All it would take was someone accidentally running into him. Then again, nobody had much cause to run into what they thought was a solid object, did they? This must be another reason why Dumbledore procured this Ghost Net for Harry...so he could just be another nameless face in the crowd, rather than trying to navigate his way through it as a ghost. It was hardly an intelligent thing for Harry to mess with his own visibility, as he still hadn't quite got the knack of switching invisible.

Adonna was almost as apprehensive as he was. After all, it was the image of his face that had caused her to be thrown in here in the first place. They all made their way slowly yet uneventfully through the main foyer, and Harry felt a great sense of relief wash over everybody as they passed through the exit waterfall. Mercifully, he felt nothing other than mild pressure as he walked under the ethereal stream.

Harry looked up and saw that Hedwig was still on her street lamp perch. He waved at her a silent greeting and she hooted at him. Good old Hedwig, who had made it through the accident and found Harry...

The four of them had waited only less than a minute when two non-descript vehicles pulled up to the side of the curb and two very familiar people exited from each of the driver's doors. They took one look at Harry and Adonna, walked up to them and said dazedly, "There's three of you?"

"Bloody—"

"—hell!"

"Top—"

"—shelf!"

"Ace—"

"—brill!" the pair exclaimed, characteristically finishing one another's phrases.

Their chauffers were none other than Fred and George Weasley.

Dear Readers,

For whatever reason—and I'm sure most of the reason is because of the many reviews I've been getting—this will be the 3rd chapter posting I have made within 8 days, despite being sick w/bronchitis. OO Whoa.

Heads up for you all—the section of this fic only has about 2-3 more chapters at most, meaning Harry Gets Even Part I is nearly complete. I advise you to submit any questions you have for me, as I will try to answer them through the fic, as long as it doesn't ruin any important plot elements for the subsequent sections I will be writing. In the words of reader brightshadow, I “don't give up the fic!” LOL!

I hope this following chapter answers almost everything, as that is my intent. And in the previous chapter, I told you all to look for clues in the poem. I couldn't have stated it any more plainly—do as Lupin did...copy and paste the poem into your word processor, remove all the spaces and lead in punctuation, and then highlight the beginning letters down the stanzas. You will then know who the “helpful friend” is.

I know there's more stuff I wanted to say, but my brain is jelly right now, so I shall instead submit this chapter and hope for the best. As always, enjoy your read! Lurve ya'll, Rae ;D

BREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAK

The twins didn't quite know whom to approach first and Harry was at a bit of a loss over seeing them, too. Lupin and Tonks took over brief explanations and introductions, starting with Adonna. Despite the fact Madam seemed to vaguely recognise Fred and George, she was still understandably vulnerable and unsure of herself. She might know who they were, but they didn't know who she was. As a result, Harry watched the otherwise confident healer become unusually quiet and wary. Harry knew this was one place where she needn't worry at all, however. Once the twins found out who she was, they immediately dropped their playful manner to one of subdued respect.

“So you're the healer,” they said together and each shook her hand. “Mum and Dad told us about what you did for Harry,” continued

George. Fred picked up, "We tried to come see you, when they had you up St. Mungo's the first time following the crash."

"And the hospital wouldn't let us, but mum and dad didn't care you weren't awake," George went on. "Mum brought you flowers from the Burrow everyday, the first three days."

Adonna replied, slightly stunned, "I wondered why Molly and Arthur Weasley sounded familiar, but I couldn't place it." Madam was clearly not used to this type of gratitude of her services, despite her profession. She was used to people just walking away and doing nothing. It was wonderful to see the healer finally reap some benefits from having helped him. "Thank you so much," she said finally.

"It's thanks to you we still have Harry," the twins logically replied, equally indebted. Nobody could set you at ease or welcome you like the Weasleys could.

After a short recharged reunion with Harry, the entire party got off the street and into the cars. The seating arrangement in Harry's car included Dumbledore up front with Fred, and in the back seat Harry and Tonks flanked Ginny on her left side, whilst Adonna and Lupin were on her right. Admittedly, it was interesting being able to sit in such close proximity to living people again, thanks to the cloak. Harry realised the reason for this particular seating arrangement almost immediately—everyone in the other car included those unfamiliar with the Order of the Phoenix.

In spite of herself, Ginny was staring at Adonna, but Harry could easily tell it was out of concern rather than shock. As the healer sat down wearily after her long walk, the red-haired girl reached out delicately for her face and inquired gently, "It's been so long. Does it...hurt you?" It was clear Ginny was referring to the healer's lack of transfiguration.

Adonna smiled slightly and replied, "No. Not really." Harry knew at once that was an outright lie but it was in Madam's nature to reassure people, so he kept her secret.

Once they got under way, Dumbledore said, "I suppose now is the time for elaborations." He began a detailed explanation of Psychromancy beginning with a comparison, and the rest of them filled Fred and Ginny in as best they could as they went along.

"Have you ever heard of Necromancy?" inquired Dumbledore.

Ginny answered instantly, "Yeah. That's the practise of divining the future by contacting the spirits of the dead. Trelawney told us about how it's a lost Dark Art and almost nobody does it anymore."

"That's true," answered the headmaster, "but it's not the full definition. Necromancy can also include influencing the dead to do one's bidding. And I'm not speaking about spirits, either. I'm referring to physical coercion of corpses—turning them into Undead. This is a completely unwilling possession, however. What's left of buried bodies does not want to be disturbed and never should be. That is why it is such a good thing this practise has mostly died out, as it were. Tonks, have the Aurors ever had cause to subdue such things on assignment lately?" He asked of her in back.

"None that I'm aware of," she answered him cautiously. "Then again, I've only been on a comparably short time."

Harry and the other youth sat and contemplated about what had just been told them. Corporeal possession of the dead? At this point Harry had certainly seen the wrong side of not living, but he was still utterly repulsed by the idea. Zombies were definitely not something he ever wanted to mess around with. It was more than disturbing to think some people might still actually do this type of thing. He was virtually certain Voldemort would know how though, if anyone did. If Psychromancy was anything like Necromancy...

"Psychromancy however," Dumbledore continued, "is a corollary, and completely opposite in nature and intent. While Necromancy is living possession of the dead, Psychromancy is a noncorporeal's possession of the living."

Harry's head snapped to look at Ginny and he demanded, "Are you saying I possessed her, the way Voldemort possessed me?" He was

appalled at the very concept. "I'm sorry Ginny, I didn't mean to hurt you that way—" She began to shake her head vehemently when the headmaster continued.

"No," Dumbledore emphasized firmly. "What you did was nothing in comparison to that. The proper term is 'shared' or 'borrowed' rather than 'possessed.' In fact, Miss Weasley has full recollection of the time you were inside her mind," the headmaster said significantly.

Turning to Ginny, Harry asked incredulously, "Is that true?"

Ginny told him, "It's true. Most of it I spent with my eyes closed, but I still can remember all of what happened. Taking Malfoy out was so perfect," she massaged her knuckles where dark bruises had formed on them. "You pack quite a punch though, Potter."

His eyes widened as he looked at her and she smirked up at him. Fortunately, that was the extent of the damage he had caused Ginny. He winced, carefully took her injured hand in his and said sheepishly, "Sorry."

She smiled and responded, "That's quite all right. I'd like to think I'm part of the next raving headline in The Prophet, "HARRY GETS EVEN!" It caused them all to laugh and he glanced away while his fingers automatically tightened around hers. It was such a simple gesture, but it was something he had taken for granted...

Fred had to know all the intimate details of Harry and Ginny's round with the Slytherins, so they enthusiastically humoured him for a time.

It wasn't too long before the older professor continued, "One of the biggest differences between Psychromancy and Necromancy is the effects it has on those who are being influenced; this is both during and after the task as well. Psychromancy must have both parties be willing to help each other, because it's more a type of hypnotism than anything else. People cannot be hypnotized against their wishes. Also, the more intelligent someone is, the easier it is to hypnotize them. That's what you did with Miss Weasley, Harry. You might have said, "Imperio", but that was not the spell that you exacted on her.

Lupin can elaborate a bit more on this, I believe.” He deferred to the former professor in the back.

Remus nodded and continued, “Spirits are, by their very nature, dark. Not necessarily dark in countenance so much as condition. It’s because darkness is the only state in which most of them can exist; any kind of light or intense energy disperses their incorporeal bodies or even drives them away entirely. But dark is not who or what you are, Harry.” Lupin faced him as directly as he could. “That was demonstrated in full force tonight. With the rapid-fire mentoring Donnie gave to you,” he looked at the healer considerably, “you were able to gain an unprecedented amount of control over all of the energy in your environment. And it all started with your—or rather Voldemort’s—wand. Might I inspect it please?” Harry reached into his robes and handed the black wand to Remus.

“It’s why I didn’t recognise it when I saw you use it. You see, no object in itself is inherently evil. It’s the same way with people. Everyone can sense ultimate evil to some extent or another; it’s just that you had used this wand before we saw it, so none of the rest of us knew it for what it was. You inadvertently used your lighter magic and tried to force it through this wand by using the words of an Unforgivable Curse.” He half smiled, saying, “I’m happy to say it backfired miserably. In the hands of a completely different master, this wand became a tool of good. Light magic through a dark object creates a sort of grey or ‘shadow magic’ which can go one way or the other, depending on the power of who directs it.”

“That must be true,” Harry responded, “before I used any spells with that wand, Ginny sort of recognised it and I wondered why. Now we know,” he said differentially, as he and Ginny raised their eyebrows at each other.

“It also appears that he altered his wand,” Dumbledore said, as he glanced back at Lupin. Remus handed him the wand. “Yew is not a black wood, not unless it is stained. He changed it for some reason.”

Almost instantly, Harry knew the reason for the alteration, and told everyone as much. “That...gloss he put on it...I know what it’s for now.” He paused, remembering a most horrible moment of his past.

“Voldemort had to have Wormtail use his wand for him, before his rebirth two years ago. He never wanted to be subservient to a lesser wizard again, if he ever had to face incorporeal existence once more.” Harry’s lips tightened and he went on, “So he put something on his wand, in order for him to wield it, even as a ghost. That’s why I can hold onto it.”

“Once again, his best laid plans were thwarted because of unforeseen circumstances. I’d say his attempt to convince you of your supposed inner evilness failed rather spectacularly,” observed Dumbledore, and all in the car agreed.

Adonna spoke up for the first time this conversation and said, “No Psychromancer could have achieved the level of power you have, simply because of your base. Almost all Psychromancers have been incorporeal, but you have three earthly anchors you are still attached to through your mind, since the Gemini Stasis Charm did not cause you a true death. It was a tearing asunder instead. Those terrestrial connections include your body, You-Know-Who, and myself. When minds have touched in that fashion, it always leaves an unerasable mark.”

Remus picked up again and added, “It’s also of interest to know that Psychromancers were far more common in the Dark Ages and other times of war. They were and are extremely influential spirits, and typically become manifest in times of greatest danger or need. Many of them have been of note around ancient battlefields, fortresses, or other places of pain or suffering. Nearly all of them have been tied to one person, family, or location; Harry doesn’t appear to have this limitation, however. Psychromancy is the noncorporeal’s method of ultimate preservation over another. Meaning that you Harry, yourself, have become a spirit of total protection,” he said fiercely. “You are the aphysical embodiment of both someone’s need and love for you.”

The healer looked at him directly and went on, “Even Muggles can usually feel the effects of a Psychromancer—spirits who can help them accomplish extraordinary things by influencing their minds and bodies to do astonishing feats. Omnilumency is the way you coax the living to do things physically, not just mentally. Perhaps you would better recognise the non-wizard term—Muggles refer to beings like

you as ‘guardian angels.’ In your case, ‘avenging angel’ would probably be more accurate.”

Harry was blown away with this knowledge. Once again, due to the unfailing power of love, he had not only been able to keep his spirit as one but defend those he cared for as well. Even if the Muggle terms meant nothing to anyone else in the car, they meant more than enough to him.

“But you needed a catalyst to bring you back,” continued Adonna. “Only a family member or someone similar could have done this. Somebody you care deeply for had to be hurting, so that you could be summoned from Elsewhere. Something physical had to have touched your being. It’s the only way you could have been seen by them.”

As Adonna shot Harry a fiery look over the top of Ginny’s head, Harry inadvertently began to focus on the crimson streak still running down the back of her red hair. His jaw dropped slightly as he finally caught the meaning of the healer’s statement...Ginny’s blood in the graveyard...it had spilt on his hands. The only thing he had been able to touch as a spirit besides the black wand was Ginny’s blood. So that was his catalyst—she was the one—the one who brought him back. Even if nobody else knew, Harry knew that the healer had to. A family member or someone similar... Adonna knew without a doubt, as he read the thought foremost in her mind, it’s the romance part of Psychromancy, Harry. She knows it, too—has known since you first met.

Though Ginny dared not to even look at him, Harry knew Madam was right again. It also explained why Harry had always felt he’d practically belonged at the Burrow—Hermione had called him the “dark-haired Weasley” once as a joke—but he could sense that it was true now. They really were his second family. Ginny subconsciously tightened her grip on him as he ran his other hand across the back of her hair. How could he have been so blind.... But Ginny knew that too...she understood his idiocy concerning her—knew he’d had a load of other things to worry about.

Just as the silence in the car neared the deafening level, Madam said, “Elsewhere is also where you experienced the Fright Bus and

darkened King's Cross and London. You've always been capable of something called 'astral projection.' That's a term used to describe it when you have an out-of-body experience and can see another point of view. This is the same whether you're looking back on yourself, or seeing through another's eyes," explained Adonna.

Fred joined in, "That's like when you saw dad hurt in the Ministry, Harry!" It was nice to finally have a definition to put to what Harry was doing whenever he went stumbling into visions from Voldemort.

"Many people mistake astral projection as one's spirit leaving their body, but that isn't quite true. It's actually a sort of carbon copy of their consciousness, if you will. So Voldemort drew out the carbon copy of you, and then I...persuaded your actual spirit to leave your body, and join the copy. That was the biggest switch. And no, this isn't something just anybody could have seen happening. That's why it's referred to as 'Elsewhere.' You're spiritually present, but what you see can still be heavily influenced by outside interference. This is referring back to the box. I still don't know entirely who else was trying to help you with that gift box, but it wasn't anybody living. That much I know...although it is somehow tied in with your new morphing abilities," she added.

Tonks said, "Yeah, I was wondering about that. I thought us Metamorphs were born...that's what I told Harry last year when he asked me."

"Yes, that is true." Then Adonna corrected, "but there is more than one way to be 'born' into that ability, as it were. Mind you, this is mostly theory on my part. Although I know now that you have always had the latent talent, Harry—remember how you made your hair grow back after your aunt chopped it off—something else brought it to the forefront for you. You were raised Muggle and never knew to even look for such signs, let alone practise the magical talents you possessed."

She ticked off reasons on her fingers, "So your morphing ability became another internal spirit of protection for you, that only became manifest when your godfather... passed away in the Department of Mysteries. The next time you had cause to panic or defend yourself

from evil was during the car wreck the about a week after your ordeal.” She looked at him meaningfully again, “Was it not your godfather you were thinking of just before I found you that night? Why Ernie and Stan failed to recognise you, why you, your double and I have Sirius’s hair, why I now have his eye colour?”

Harry nodded to the healer in shocked confirmation. She was right again—she had to be. Everyone else in the car was polite out of courtesy to the conversation going on between he and the healer as she still continued, “You are indeed unique, Harry. You may have been born Metamorph, but the gift itself within you was altered due to circumstance by means of that spirit of protection. You had to become a true changeling, for that’s what you are, due to your godfather’s defence of you.”

Sirius’s sacrifice for him had left Harry a similar gift that Lily’s had—that spirit of protection, so Harry could fend off or hide from those trying to attack him. It was very heartening to know his godfather hadn’t died for nothing, and Harry felt his heart lift concerning that burden for the first time ever.

“I realise this is completely off-topic,” Lupin said, “but I believe the person assisting Harry...Elsewhere...and whomever sent this poem to the living were two separate people.” The rest of the adults in the car murmured their agreement.

“Yes, I’m quite certain they are. Another important thing of note is that, although initially true Harry.... Voldemort was wrong about you being able to continue without your body. Remember what I said about thoughts reading as true, when that’s really not the case? For you, your soul should have been able to make it—if you had a normal death—but again, the G.S. Charm comes into play. I can prove it to you. First of all, you’re having trouble with dispersal and visibility, correct?”

Harry eyebrows puckered and he answered, “Yes.”

“It’s also near impossible for you to pass through things, correct?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re also experiencing horrible drains which seemingly have nothing to do with usage of your magical power?”

“Sometimes, yes.” Harry wondered what she was driving at.

“And what is one thing—or rather two things you have visually, that no other ghost you have ever seen has?” She asked this question significantly and pointed down toward the floor in front of Harry.

“He has feet!” Ginny shouted in realisation. “None of the Hogwarts ghosts have them, either. I knew there was something different! He has to move around like any other living person!”

The healer smiled at her and said, “Exactly. There are mortal pieces of him scrambled with the immortal pieces, and they are irrevocably tied to one another. So if his physical body goes...” turning to Harry, Adonna went on, “it won’t be long before you do either. You need each other, Harry.”

Intuitively, Harry knew there was something else very important Madam had failed to add to her statement, so he did it for her.

“And if we go,” he elaborated extensively, “you do too, don’t you? We’re all in this together, because of the Charm.” It was evident to Harry that Adonna felt saving herself was somehow much less significant than making sure he was okay, but Harry wasn’t about to let her keep thinking that way.

“The eclipse tonight—that will help us reverse what has happened?” Harry inquired to everyone at large.

Dumbledore answered him, “It is my belief that if you use *Priori Incantatem* on this black wand, it will at least allow you to rejoin with your physical body, even if it can’t fully undo the charm severing. The eclipse is mother nature’s very own practise at deception—which is why Lupin is human now, not wolf. With the combined power of thousands of people who care for you and the effects of the eclipse, this will create a time turner singularity—one on a cosmic scale, since that’s the only thing that can possibly allow your reconciliation with

your body, Harry. It is also Friday the 13th of July, so the power of deceiving is at an all-time strength.”

“Thousands of people?” Harry questioned disbelievingly. “And just how are we going to pull that off?”

The headmaster smiled his all-knowing smile and said, “By performing your wandlighting ceremony one night in advance,” Dumbledore finished.

As they pulled up to the cemetery, Harry looked outside the window. Save for the Quidditch and Triwizard tournaments, he had never seen such a gathering of magic folk, and certainly not just for him. Through some inexplicable manner, Dumbledore had managed to transfer most of the entire lot of Harry’s supporters from Hogwarts to London, all within approximately two hours.

“So many people...” whispered Harry. He could scarcely believe they were all there for him. “Why?”

Lupin had a ready answer for this as he said, “Lord Voldemort’s impatience not only caused the Ministry to try and hush Adonna and cart her away, but framing you for murder and trying to shut the story up in that fashion was the worst possible type of overkill. Within a week of Ministry finally telling the public you weren’t a liar about Voldemort’s return, they did yet another about face and called you a murderer after you’d saved your relatives. Even the typically indifferent public smelled a rat. And then you...died, so the people took up your cause for you. Why, you ask?” Remus grinned purposefully and answered his question, “Because Voldemort mistakenly made you their martyr.”

Dear Readers,

I'm baaaack! (DUN DUN DUN) I apologise dearly for the delay in posting this latest chapter. My flu/bronchitis turned into a dual respiratory infection...lower viral in my lungs and upper in my sinuses. I had to go out of town for breathing machine treatments and was pretty much a human slug for two weeks, as I had also slipped a disk in my back, which caused a relapse of my infections because I couldn't move around...etc etc...

I'm so pleased that you all seemed to like what Psychromancy and what it's all about. That chapter was soooo very intense to write, but it was most enjoyable to see people's reactions to it! As I've said to some of you, I hope it was well worth your wait...;)

For those of you who like to go back and read things, I have also posted more song lyrics at the lead-ins to some of the chapters. I am currently in the process of finding songs for all the chapters, to create a soundtrack to read the book to, as it were. It's my way of pairing my three greatest recreational loves...music, writing, and Harry Potter...lol I know it might seem odd to have a book w/a soundtrack but oh well! It works for me!

I also did it seeing as I wrote this ebook specifically so it would be adaptable to a movie or screenplay.

The SFX, foley, director, and actors would sure as hellfire get a workout in this kind of movie...especially Harry. A young teenage male who could convincingly portray the three separate roles of Ghost Harry, Donnie/Harry and Jamie/Harry would have to be nothing short of phenomenal. Anyhoo, just more expounding. Hope you all enjoy this chapter as much as previous ones, and thanks for waiting patiently for me. Love, Rae ;D

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Dumbledore had everyone quietly exit the car and instructed Harry and Madam Adonna to still keep their heads covered. Apparently the headmaster had yet to explain to the gathered crowds precisely why

he had called them all to this particular location. The biggest reason why was that the older man himself hadn't known what they were going to find in their pursuit of Harry and his friends; only that doing so somehow involved a very important meeting concerning Harry Potter.

Before entering the cemetery's wrought-iron gates, Dumbledore pulled Harry aside.

"I know that we usually have our chats together after your current travail is completed," the headmaster went on seriously, "but I fear it must be done differently this time."

Harry wasn't exactly sure how to respond. The anger he had felt toward the professor following the Department of Mysteries debacle had mostly abated by this point, but Harry still couldn't help feeling a bit of resentment at having been essentially lied to by this man for nearly six years. Trust was not something Harry ever gave easily, and for most of Harry's Hogwarts education, he had trusted the professor even more deeply than he'd trusted Sirius. It was strange to think his absolute loyalty to Dumbledore had been the one thing that called Fawkes to him in the Chamber of Secrets.

"In a rejoining such as this," continued the professor, "what you need to know is the memories and experiences you have held within you over the past two weeks as a spirit have no place in the flesh. I also believe that the time turner event will replace you directly after when you were abducted and the charm was severed. That would be the best place for you; alive and given a chance to continue your recovery in the past. Even if Voldemort thought to look for you then, whenever his initial absconding of you took place, measures have been taken to prevent him from disappearing with you again."

Staring hard at the professor, Harry felt a sinking sensation in his chest. "Are you saying...that...I'm not going to remember any of this? I won't remember being dead, I won't remember wandering...I won't remember...them, what they all did for me?" He gestured over toward his friends.

The headmaster glanced down for a moment, looked back at Harry and replied, "Nobody, save for you and Adonna, will remember anything of this. You both will still have impressions, emotions, overpowering moments of déjà vu, recurring dreams, and other such fleeting insight. What precisely, you will remember I cannot say. Just try and hold above all else that this would not have been possible without your fellow students."

Harry already knew that was true. It was also the reason he felt such despondence over not being able to remember all they had accomplished in the name of his preservation. Bringing him back...back from quandary, back from death, back from dementors...Harry's fists clenched involuntarily.

"But I don't want to forget..." his voice faded despairingly, "they deserve so much more than that...I owe them...everything. Even if it means not going through with this, I don't want to go back to...to...." his throat constricted and he swallowed.

The side of Dumbledore's mouth lifted slightly and he added understandingly, "Back to underestimating them?"

Blinking painfully, Harry nodded to the headmaster.

"I know it's hard to believe at this point, but I can honestly tell you that you won't, Harry. Just be aware ambivalence is something you should always be cautious over." The professor took a deep breath and elaborated, "You see, as we age, most of us exchange our youthful trust and blind devotion for something better. Or rather, something we mistakenly perceive as better—something called greater knowledge or higher intelligence. That couldn't be further from the truth, however."

Dumbledore clasped his hands behind his back, as if steadying himself. "I know you don't fully understand why yet, but when you died a week ago, a piece inside of many of the adult wizardfolk died with you—myself included. Not all of us had the influence of Voldemort upon us; it was something self-induced. So this...wandlighting ceremony was not only meant as a means to sway the Ministry's wrongful verdict by the rising tide of popular opinion. It

was mostly intended as a way of...reminding everyone that Harry Potter can never die, as long as we remember him and what he inspired in each of us," he reached out a hand to place it on Harry's shoulder. "Scarcely did we know, it would literally be in part responsible for calling him back to us in a way we didn't dare hope."

The headmaster was right when he'd said Harry didn't fully understand why all this was happening. But Harry did know one thing as he spoke up softly, "But someone did dare hope...eight someones did." He recalled the earlier intimation of a smaller, but no less significant gathering in this graveyard. Going against the Underage Decree and facing expulsion for him and everything...

Dumbledore smiled and gestured toward Harry's friends. "Yes, they did. It is every child's expectation, privilege, and birthright to believe in the impossible; fight what they feel is wrong and have faith in something they cannot prove or see. Sometimes, all they have to go on is by internal feelings only—gut instinct. I know you don't think so, but you still have that ability inside of you. Not everything you've experienced is as a direct result of someone else having chided you or thrown you into it."

Not able to discern what Dumbledore was referring to, Harry merely shook his head as an invitation for the elder man to continue.

"Can you think of nothing?" The headmaster inquired gently. "For nearly ten years, unbeknownst to you—and myself at the time—you knew nothing of your true heritage. In ways I will regret to the day I die, you were downtrodden and abused to the point of being treated more like a miscreant house pet instead of a human being," he went on severely. Then he shut his eyes for a bit and when he opened them, they were shiny with moisture. "Yet something inside of you refused to submit to their insistence of your inferiority. Not one single person ever told you that what you were being subjected to was wrong, but you knew it anyway. So you see, just as in the Department of Mysteries, it was your child-like heart which saved you."

Harry began to rethink his assessment of why Dumbledore had left him on the doorstep of 4 Privet Drive on 1st November of 1981. True, there was always the blood protective factor that went beyond magic.

But it was the nature vs. nurture aspect in that environment which had instilled Harry with his true character. Had Harry lived with a wizard family, he most likely never would've been given the opportunity to build up that required mix of guts and gossamer, frost and inferno, silk and steel. Living like that had also given Harry an unexpected gift; the ability to have compassion on other people. If he'd been raised privileged, Harry was ninety-nine percent positive he would've ended up just like...Dudley. Or at least a self-centred arrogant berk like his father. His insides roiled and warped with those thoughts.

Still Harry couldn't deny his heritage of James's foundation. While Lily's spirit of protection lived on in him, so too did his father's grit. Ultimately, one could not have possibly expected to survive such a life-long onslaught as Harry had experienced without that unassailable Potter moxie. Dumbledore was right; Harry's heart had saved him—the same heart Lily and James had helped to sculpt.

The elder man watched the reactions flit across Harry's face and still went on, "You are stronger than you can possibly imagine. What makes you so remarkable is that you can inspire the same feeling within others. Your young friends never lost sight of that. Your particular gift includes the ability to not only inspire your friends, but every other person who is willing to listen. That kind of power only comes from within." Eyes twinkling, Dumbledore said, "Being young at heart isn't such a bad thing, you know."

Bad thing? Not at all. Harry still found it mostly incomprehensible that all of these people in the cemetery were there based purely on hope and philanthropic goodwill. It was yet another reason why he lamented the forthcoming loss of remembering all that had been shared with and for him. Suddenly, he was struck with an overwhelming need to speak to Ginny, as he remembered her and the Psychromancy explanation in the car. He had to say some things to her before he had to duly forget what was in his mind.

"I do have a question, Professor. How did you manage to get all of these people here in so short a time, from hundreds of miles away?"

The elder man smiled at him and replied, "Do you remember Hagrid's official title, from the first time he'd introduced himself to you? 'Keeper of the Keys?'" The headmaster gestured him over to several crates full of items; items that seemed oddly familiar somehow. Keeper of the Keys...Hagrid...

"Hagrid was Keeper of Portkeys? All of that junk around his hut...." Harry saw the chipped mugs and other innumerable things that the half-giant always had lying or hanging around his dwelling place.

"It's our back up plan, in case Hogwarts ever needed a mass evacuation. The protective wards around the fortress would never allow Disapparating, even if the students could manage it. The wards are also why we needed to come here; we needed a specific piece of ground which was enchanted from Muggle sight yet could draw the magic from the night sky."

As Harry marveled at the ingeniousness of wizardfolk and Hogwarts, Dumbledore turned and led all of Harry's friends except for Ginny to a main part of the graveyard where everyone's parents had gathered. Fred and George led the rest of them to a sequestered corner of the cemetery to meet up with the remaining Weasleys and Hermione's family.

As Harry's group hadn't been able to fully explain what was going on yet, the first person Hermione spotted who looked like Harry was Donnie instead. The healer was being supported between Fred and George when Harry's bushy-haired best friend rushed over and peeked under Adonna's grey cloak.

"I can't believe it's true!" cried Hermione and threw her arms around Donnie. Ron and his family quickly chased up the young girl. Madam quickly overcame her initial startled reaction as she looked at Harry under his white hood. They raised their eyes at each other, realising that words were only going to confuse everyone at this point. Strangely enough, everybody else who had just arrived was struck speechless as well. Rather, the healer accepted Hermione's misplaced affection and embraced her in return, just as Harry would have done.

It made him ache inside to watch Adonna smile kindly back into Hermione's tear-stained face as she broke the silence and said, "While I appreciate this heartfelt welcome, I'm not the one you all seek." She looked back at Harry and motioned for him to push back his hood.

Everyone's faces quickly garnered looks of confusion as the twins told everyone, "This isn't Harry, it's Madam Adonna—the healer who helped him on the Knight Bus."

They began to wander over to Harry and looked at him in awe. Ron shook his head and said astonishedly, "Like Hermione said, I can't believe it's really you, mate."

Harry smiled softly in response and replied, "Don't tell me you two are actually agreeing on something!"

They all happily laughed with him, finally convinced that he was indeed the genuine article.

Hermione quickly and tearfully hugged Harry the same way she'd hugged Donnie. The one time Harry could remember Hermione ever doing something similar had been straight before his facing the Horntail at the first Triwizard Task. Ron started to pull back to give them some more room when Hermione disengaged herself, reached her arm back and grabbed the redhead, saying, "Don't be silly, Ron! Nobody's going to mind if you give your best mate a hug!" And she made him part of their circle as everyone smiled at them and waited for their turn to personally address Harry. Ron blushed and stood off to the side with Fred and George.

"I'm sorry that I thought you were dead," said Hermione guiltily, tearing up again, barely managing to look Harry in the eyes. He could feel the same emotion emanating from Ron, too. "I should have known that you couldn't be put down..." She leaned over and whispered in his ear, "I mean, you've been dead once before...and you...well, we changed that. Remember?"

Looking deep into Hermione's eyes, he was pulled into another shared memory with someone... He and his best friend were

standing behind Harry and Sirius at the darkened, frozen lakeside at Hogwarts of two years ago. The dementors were converging over he and his godfather.... Harry watched himself scream with pain and collapse on the ground. "You died," he felt himself say with Hermione's voice, "both of you...."

Their memory faded and Harry drew Hermione into his arms again. She was right...but she shouldn't feel guilty for not knowing about his false death. "Please don't think on it, Hermione. I know what it's like to be...influenced by...him. It wasn't your fault." He reached up his gloved hands and smoothed the tears off Hermione's face. She was surprised that he could do this, surprised that he'd borrowed her memory from her, but...she understood and was grateful. "Thank you," she said softly, smiling up at him.

Mrs. Weasley hugged him fiercely and quickly, apparently determined not to make a spectacle of herself. Harry could easily tell she was just as grateful that he wasn't dead as anyone else, if not more so. She also didn't want to embarrass Harry and simply said, "You should always consider yourself our seventh son. Welcome back to us, Harry."

Then she promptly marched over to Donnie, who had shrunk back a bit from the group out of politeness to Harry. Having been unable to mother Harry or Jamie the way she wanted to, Molly instead turned all of her attentions on the unwitting healer. It was impossible for Harry not to snigger as he watched Mrs. Weasley examine Madam's face, telling her how "peaky" she looked and making a fuss over her hair. Donnie's features contorted in self-righteous indignation at the invasion, but she still stayed quiet, mostly out of astonishment than anything else. The twins were doing all the protesting for her anyway. "Oi, mum...leave her alone, she's a healer...."

Percy was the only one not there, out of obvious concern for his safety. As everybody finished their talking with Harry, he found himself looking at Ginny again. She was standing by Hermione when Harry walked up to the red-haired girl and asked her to follow him. Ginny suddenly got a very odd look on her face, but she nodded and they walked to a nearby copse of trees. Before Harry could even say anything, Ginny began speaking to him.

“Look, I’m very sorry. I suppose I was wrong about you being a ghost because of Sirius. It just...made sense to me. I was sort of...not paying attention to things properly, I guess. I mean...I didn’t even know about this wandlighting ceremony thing....” she faded away, truly apologetic.

For a moment, all Harry could do was look at her. She had totally misinterpreted his reasons for bringing her over here. He thought back to their brilliant conversation earlier; all Ginny had said regarding life, time, sarcasm.... Had Harry been a good and proper ghost, he knew that it would have been exactly as Ginny had said regarding his godfather. Guilt was an emotion that was plentiful amongst people who dared to care for the ones they loved. It had nearly eaten Harry alive...but now he was effectively being given a second chance.

“It’s sort of morbidly funny that I can’t even manage to die correctly,” he told her, smiling half-heartedly, “but I’ve come to realise...that kind of oddity is typical for me. Either way, it doesn’t really matter, does it? At the time, you didn’t know, and I didn’t know. The feelings are all the same. As you’ve said, that’s something that will never change.” He couldn’t believe he was about to leave all of this again....

Ginny contemplated him and replied, “Yes. It is, but I never thought that...I could...it was me that....” She reached back and felt the back of her hair where the dried blood was. “Madam said it was ‘a family member only’ who could do that.”

Nodding, Harry intended to explain a bit more but instead said, “That’s why I wanted to speak to you. Dumbledore said,” he paused and gritted his teeth for a bit, “he said that I’m...after rejoining, I won’t hardly remember any of this. Nothing of what we’ve done tonight... nothing about the last ten days...”

Rather than feeling sorry for herself, Ginny was filled with compassion as she said, “That’s good! Isn’t it? I mean...all these terrible things that you went through, that...your double went through. I’m so glad you won’t be able to recall it.” She ran a hand over her

eyes in pure relief. "I can't imagine what he—what you—must have gone through the past while."

He hadn't even thought about it that way before; the pair found themselves at an impasse. Harry didn't want to forget her sacrifice, and she wanted nothing more than for him to make it through this with as little damage as possible. It was like looking into a mirror, hearing her words and reading her thoughts. Had they really both changed so much over the past five years?

"I'd be lying if I said I..." this was very tough territory to tread, but Harry knew that honesty was the only thing acceptable for the current situation. "...I don't feel the same here like I did for Cho...but..." he trailed off again and tried not to blush. "It's totally different...stronger...but I'd be lying if I said I...I...wanted to kiss you right now." He turned hurriedly; sure he'd said far too much this time.

Ginny smiled kindly and replied, "Oh, that. Truly, I don't give too much credence to my feelings of...romantic propensity toward anyone in particular," now it was her turn to blush. Flexing her fingers she continued, "It's not like I expected you to haul off and snog me over the...Psychromancy thing, even if you could." She looked to the side and muttered, "Great goblins, did I just say that aloud?" Harry could sense her mortification and the truth behind her words.

"Adonna could have just meant that mum and dad are supposed to adopt you," Ginny smiled hugely as she looked up at him again. "I already feel so connected to you, it's something I'd happily welcome. I suspect my folks have discussed it already; they probably just don't want you to feel obligated, or like it's a consolation thing. They'd just want you to have a place you could call home."

Harry found himself grinning at her again. If anything could ever be called a home, it would be the Burrow. And if anybody could be called his surrogate family, it would be the Weasleys. They really were all remarkable people...but Ginny in particular....

"How can I ever thank you?" Harry asked her.

She reached out and clasped his hands and answered, "There's nothing to thank, Harry. You saved me once, remember? And I never said anything to you about it. So...now we're even." Then she planted a kiss on top of each of his gloved hands.

As she let go, the headmaster approached them with everyone and explained the plan of how they were going to present the assembly with three Harrys.

"Although I do not wish to make a spectacle of any of you," said the elder professor, "no other way exists to accomplish the effect that we desire. Please, everyone follow me." The professor turned and everyone began to follow him, but Hagrid and Lupin hung back.

Harry turned around and asked, "Aren't you coming?"

The pair just shook their heads and Remus said, "People might be ready to welcome you, but remember that werewolves and half-giants are still basically being hunted or weeded out right now. Being employed at Hogwarts, even in the past, tends to give one a rather high profile," he added, a tad cynically.

That didn't matter to Harry a bit. Not one damn bit. Nobody should stop Lupin and Hagrid from being present if they wanted to be. All of the talk about staying true to one's self amounted to a gigantic pile of hippogriff manure if they left right now. Harry told them both as much, only using decidedly more colourful vocabulary. Looking at Dumbledore, the adults seemed to have agreed to give Harry's suggestion a go for now, even if it was to keep his rather profane spirits at bay. Harry had no idea it was largely because they heard a zapping sound crack the air around him as he'd displayed his disgust.

Just as they were about to leave again, Moody and Snape approached the group. Harry could tell Lupin was practically itching at the chance to interrogate Severus over the travelling satchel; a feeling Harry secretly happened to share.

The Potions master said to Dumbledore, "All is finished according to schedule and plan, Headmaster. No more or less than what was required."

Something about the way Snape said the word “required” instantly made a missing piece click into place in Harry’s brain. He turned to Snape and exclaimed amazedly, “It was you! He’s the stranger in the tearoom, Ginny! It’s him who talked to us!”

The dour professor smirked at him condescendingly and answered, “I haven’t the slightest idea what you’re referring to. However, it is characteristic by one with the name of Potter to make up fanciful stories when it suits him.” Snape then got a severe look to his features and ended, “Just remember, that which I don’t know can kill you.”

Something happened as Harry tried to read the carefully guarded thoughts surrounding Snape’s mind. The professor’s current treatment of Harry caused the young man to inadvertently go beyond the barrier of Snape’s outer mental defences. Not knowing what was going on, Harry felt a sort of telepathic shudder the deeper he went into the potion master’s mind. Thoughts flitted past him...memories...images...he was being irresistibly drawn to something...and then suddenly—

SLAM. Something had shut in front of Harry’s face just as he was about to reach his intended goal.

Dear Readers,

WOE BE UNTO THEE WHO FAIL TO READ AUTHOR'S NOTES!

I realise this is a comparably short chapter when held up to most others, but I ask you to bear with me on that. There are some HUGE HUGE things yet to be revealed, and I don't want to miss or forget anything as I pull it together in the end for you all.

And as much as you are impatient for new updates/chapters, I am much more keen to have them completed and posted. I don't really wish to keep anything from anyone, but I also refuse to submit crap work. Everything must be tight. This has caused me to break up my most recent work into "bite size" chapters, as it were...LOL. Meaning, I could make you wait for more than a week between chapters, but I choose to parse it out in smaller doses. So sit back, relax, grab a Snickers... fun-sized ;P For you Brits out there, go and get a Nestles Aero bar (mint, of course) or an orange KitKat.

Thanks for you who betad this chapter, and no I will not mention names, because I don't want them to be pestered by you others for information on what comes next! Me getting it in the neck from you enthusiastic fans for upcoming news is bad enough...hehehe. I don't want my wonderful proofers to have to bow out of helping me! As always, lurve and enjoy, Rae :D

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Snape commenced to do something Harry had never seen or heard him do before. He'd cried aloud, "ALBUS!" to Dumbledore as the mental door had shut on Harry. The Slytherin professor was also staring down at Harry in utter shock and horror.

"You didn't help me because Dumbledore told you to," Harry told him loudly, "you helped out because you're afraid of me!" And he proceeded to peel back Snape's internal defences with his mind. More astonishing still, this accomplished Occlumens could not stand up to Harry's relentless onslaught.

Something very dark was at the centre of Snape's mind...and it was something involving Harry. Vague impressions of the past began to fill the young man's mind...he was following a hooded figure toward the entrance of a small house...Harry felt a personal familiarity about it...

More sense of urgency was pressing in on the young wizard; Snape's mind was clawing at him, trying to pull Harry's projected self away.... For this time, Severus had no Pensieve to hide what was in his mind from the young Potter.

The door of the house Harry had seen was quickly blasted open, only to reveal the wild-eyed form of a courageous twenty-something James Potter. That's why he'd recognised it! Harry was back on the steps at Godric's Hollow of fifteen years ago...this must be the night his parents were murdered, and the only person that Snape must've been following was—

"You wish to prove your loyalty to me as one of my own," screeched a chillingly familiar voice. The hooded figure in front of him half-turned, revealing an equally frightful profile. Long and slender alabaster fingers extended a wand toward memory-Snape, and the hooded person casually flicked its head toward James in the doorway. Then two words were uttered so menacingly that it frosted Harry to the core. "Kill him."

Another voice unexpectedly entered Harry's consciousness. "Harry, I am aware that you have every right to do what you are doing. This man has been almost nothing but a hindrance to you since your first day at Hogwarts. I am also aware you have no active reason to trust me right now, but please believe me when I say that you have nothing to gain by finishing your current action on Severus. You have only to lose. Back down out of good for yourself, not for him or me. I beg you."

Harry was poised in the scaling of the Potion master's response to Voldemort. Had Severus Snape really accepted the wand and killed James Potter? Harry had easily sensed the indecision about the memory of a younger Slytherin, and this was despite the fact that

Snape held no reason whatsoever not to do away with his hated rival. The Potions master was many things, but was he a murderer too?

Though everything Harry felt screamed at him to continue, the headmaster's psychic plea for Harry's acquiescence truly struck a chord within the young wizard. Dumbledore had actually acknowledged Harry's beholding right as a man, not as a child. As he withdrew from the professor's mind, Harry watched as the shaken Slytherin attempted to compose himself and garnered stares from the others around him, as they had been mostly unaware of what Harry, Snape, and Dumbledore were engaged in.

That didn't stop Snape from retaining his typical internal sneer toward Harry, however. Someone less than half his age may have nearly taken the oily professor down, but Snape would have sooner gnawed off his right leg than admitted fear of anything to anyone.

After shakily informing Harry that "Minerva sends her love"—it turned out that several of Hogwarts staff had to stay behind and "hold the fort", instead of coming to the graveyard—he largely ignored Harry as best he could as the young man continued to eye him repeatedly.

Ginny and Hermione tried to discreetly question Harry, but he was too torn by what he had seen in Snape's mind. This was something he hoped didn't get lost in his transmission back into his body. Harry finally had an inkling of reason as to why Professor Snape both loathed and feared him so much.

Slowly, much of the apprehension ebbed away as they drew closer to the middle of the graveyard. Perfect strangers, magic folk Harry had never met, had filled the small clearing and beyond. He could scarcely take in all the faces, and was struck again by just how much he regretted having to forget all of this.

Harry noticed that some people were starting to point and whisper to each other. It was easy for him to tell they were expressing their fear over seeing Hagrid and Lupin. Irritation at such ignorance started to grate on his nerves.

At last Dumbledore was able to bring everyone to the appointed place in the centre of the graveyard. Once again, Harry was amazed at the amount of people who had gathered here in such a short time. A raised dias had been placed there, so that everyone might better be addressed.

The headmaster had already explained to Harry that the platform and the area around it had been enchanted to capture and amplify vocal sounds.

As Dumbledore walked up the steps of the dias, the conversation in the crowd began to quiet down, but the emotional energy was beginning to spread as the people had caught sight of the small group behind him; Harry was once again hooded and hidden as Donnie and Jamie were.

“I wish to extend a hand of gratitude for all of you gathered here tonight,” began Dumbledore, his voice booming over the heads of the assembly. “I know that it was very short notice but I can assure each of you the haste was necessary. I apologize for not giving further elaboration other than conducting a secondary wandlighting ceremony for our dear Harry Potter at this cemetery. Explanations shall be forthcoming, and I ask you to please bear with me as all is revealed. But first, I have a presentation for all of you.”

That was Harry’s cue. He gulped and nervously followed the headmaster’s earlier path up the steps and onto the platform, still keeping his head down and face hidden. Clutching a fist to his chest, he held his broken wand in place under the Ghost Net, almost positive that he would mess up or trip in front of everyone. He didn’t.

Harry stopped opposite of Dumbledore on the platform and reached into his robe. Face still concealed, Harry thrust his damaged wand into the air for all to see, glasses wire and all. Excited murmurs started to fill the air as he did so, and he sensed the rampant recognition of the holly wand amongst the crowds.

“I assume that most of you must know what this artifact is,” boomed Dumbledore. “I inform you that you are correct—it is indeed Harry

Potter's missing and damaged wand; the very wand Ministry claimed was stolen and sent out photos for in the Daily Prophet."

People began to call out such things as "where did you find it" and "how come we didn't know sooner."

The headmaster continued, "Where the wand was found is not important right now, but the reason you didn't know sooner was because it was found mere hours ago, or so."

He turned toward Hagrid, Lupin, and a concealed Donnie who took their cue and mounted the platform. The half-giant gently lowered the still-unconscious, still hidden Jamie onto the dias in between Dumbledore and Harry. Since Lupin had insisted Donnie take the last phial of Liberabiotic, the healer only needed minimal assistance and carefully lowered herself next to Jamie. But something happened as the crowds caught full on sight of Remus and Rubeus. Ripples of fear started to spread through the gathering.

This was pure idiocy, that's what it was. Had it not been for Hagrid and Lupin, Harry's depleted body would more than likely not even be around for revival at this intelligence-forsaken ceremony. Yet Harry's friends were garnering almost nothing but bigoted responses from the consensus. Thankfully though, Harry could also tell a lot of people were just as disgusted as he was with the overall errant attitude.

One officious man Harry didn't even recognise stood out and shouted, "These men—" and he pointed to Lupin and Hagrid, who had left the dias, "—are known beasts, and a danger to wizard kind. Not even you have the authority to ignore that, Professor Dumbledore. And who are these people with the cloaks over their faces? What do you mean by bringing them here? What gives you the right? Are you insane?" the man demanded.

Several equally angry people commenced to shouting similar things at the headmaster. As resultant prejudice infected various members of the crowd, something inside of Harry snapped.

“You want to know who gave him the authority?” he yelled to the man as loudly as he could. The amplifier spell took his voice and threw it outward, making it even louder. Because of this, several of the crowd members quieted, the annoying man spoke up again and called out, “Yes, I do. We all do,” and many others began nodding up at him.

Harry reached up his free hand to his hood, and pulled it back for everybody to see his ghostly yet angry face.

“I did,” he answered the man, even more passionately.

Dear Readers,

Thanks for your reviews! Wooo! I nearly got killed by a few people for posting smaller chapters, but it's working out really well just as I hoped and planned.

This was a really really intense chapter to write, and I was so electrified by the character's energy that I was channelling, that I couldn't hardly type it up! It was kind of pathetic heh... I became the Typo Princess..meh anyway.

And here, as promised, is bite-size chappy update...it is a tad longer than 22, so I still hope you all love it! Enjoy, Rae)

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A synchronized gasp escaped every throat at Harry's revelation. The people who had been protesting clapped their jaws shut, and nobody said anything. Not one word. Silence reigned supreme.

What did he expect? Harry had wanted their undivided attention, and now he had it. But what to do with it? First he'd better get his friends out of danger just in case something happened, however.

"Time for Plan B," he muttered to Dumbledore as he flew back down the steps and grabbed Hagrid and Lupin to pull them back onto the platform. The headmaster did absolutely nothing to deter him, and merely lifted his eyebrows and held up both hands in regard; Harry had complete charge of the situation.

The half-giant and Remus hung back, and as Harry had no weight to use against them, he urged them forward with a bit of his magic instead. It was quite easy because the air was packed with feelings and thoughts to focus and manipulate. The two men were somewhat startled as to what he was doing, but they followed him back onto the dias anyway.

As he did this, Ginny was spurred to action of her own kind. She had run over to the other students that had been with her and Harry on

their sojourn tonight. Still nobody said anything as the teenagers poured onto the stage behind Harry and encircled themselves about an amazed Lupin and Hagrid. Neville, Ginny, Dean, Susan, Justin, Luna, Seamus, and Michael stood in a perimeter around the two men, effectively providing a human shield for anyone who chose to try something stupid. Their message couldn't have been clearer: To get to Remus or Rubeus, you have to face us first.

Harry stared as they completed their circle and looked to Ginny. She looked back at him with a face full of seriousness at first but then smiled and winked at him. That did it. Harry returned her looked in a gratified instant. He'd told her earlier he hadn't wanted to kiss her, but he sure as hellfire wanted to kiss her now—multiple times, in fact. The girl had read his mind and intentions again for the millionth time that night. They truly made quite a team, he and Ginny.

Harry spun about and addressed the audience again. The crowds remained quiet, apparently spellbound by the very angry, very powerful spirit of Harry Potter. Rubbish, thought he, morons just need someone to give them a good talking-to. Harry sighed. If it had to be him, so be it.

"Now I believe the Professor explained we had a demonstration for you," he said, walking over to Donnie and Jamie, who were still hidden.

The healer reached into her robe and retrieved her wand. Carefully sliding open the Invisibility Cloak just enough, she exposed Jamie's arm and applied her wand to the crook of his elbow. When she pulled the wand away, Harry could see the tip glistened red. Madam held her other hand out for Harry's broken wand and put her wand tip to his in three different places: Top, middle, and base, just above the handle. Now they had three drops of living blood, to complete and reinstate the magical connection. Harry could sense a mix between confusion and realisation start within the crowd.

He took the wand back from Adonna and stood in the original spot he had taken on the dias. Holding his wand up again, he nodded to Dumbledore who had also readied his wand and placed himself for the appropriate spell.

“Priori Incantatem!” exacted the headmaster, aiming his wand tip directly in front of Harry’s.

The end of Harry’s wand presented a series of ephemeral images and sounds to everyone, the most disturbing of which was Bellatrix’s laugh at Harry’s failed Cruciatus Curse against her. Nobody who wasn’t at the Department of Mysteries that night recognised it for what it was, however. Then the last phantom spell poured forth and it happened to be Harry’s Patronus; the charm which he had performed for his O.W.L.s. a month ago. Nothing the Ministry claimed Harry had done was evidenced in the spell

memory of his broken wand.

Most of other people realised this too, and the adults knew that the only way for such spells to be recalled required living blood from the wand’s owner. They wanted to know what was going on but appeared to fear another outburst from Harry. Murmurs of astonishment were streaming actively throughout the gathering.

“I know what you’re thinking,” Harry called to the crowd. “You’re thinking that this means the half-covered person laying on the dias has to be Harry James Potter, the very same person whom you all believe to be dead. And here is the proof of death, right?” Harry pointed to his chest, “Here his spirit is, yelling to you all. So how could he possibly be alive?”

Unable to stay still, Harry began prowling the perimeter of the platform like a caged white bengal. Everyone quieted again and stared at him like the apparition he was.

“I have a story for you all,” he continued, making this up as he was going along. He didn’t have a clue what in blue blazes he was doing, merely flying by the seat of his trousers. He decided it was simply best to make it pedantic and explain things from the start of the whole fiasco.

“Once upon a time,” began Harry, “there was a wizard boy who got into a car crash.” He continued his pacing, “A car crash Ministry

accused him of deliberately causing for murderous intent, and which you have now seen for yourselves is a complete lie, as evidenced by his wand."

It pleased him to say this aloud, even if it was to a group of people who had believed in his innocence before the proper evidence was presented to them. At least they had got one thing right in that regard. Harry also could pick out faces in the crowd that he recognised; most of them were looking at him with a semblance of satisfaction.

"The true instigators of the car crash escaped notice until tonight. This wizard was hardly the only wronged party in the course of his trial by Ministry, unfortunately." He placed his hands behind his back and paused. "A healer by name of Madam Adonna came to his aid the night of the crash," he went on, and once more discerned a recognition amongst the crowds at the healer's name.

Dumbledore had explained that these people in particular had been made aware of just what Madam had done concerning Harry by maintaining his steady life force. It had helped Donnie very much to know that at least some people cared about what Ministry had done to her, considering her only crimes were social deviance and trying to save a life. Two more points up for this otherwise tolerance-challenged group of people, Harry thought begrudgingly.

"It was bad enough the healer's license was revoked because of her selfless action to try and save this wizard. But four days later, that wizard was declared dead anyway. So Madam Adonna went to Ministry in attempt to tell people her response to their wrongful declaration. For she knew one thing that nobody else did."

Harry whirled around to face Madam and asked her purposefully, "And what was your message, Donnie?"

She was almost nonplussed at being directly addressed by Harry and automatically answered him softly, "Harry Potter is not dead."

"Louder," Harry gave her a lop-sided smile and said confidently, "so they can see and hear you."

She looked at him incredulously from under her cloak, carefully got to her feet, and slid back her hood.

“Harry Potter is not dead!” Donnie exclaimed to the assembly, finally unafraid of doing so. Harry could also tell that Madam was also trying to do him justice, out of respect to his image that she was wearing. Amazing that she would still think of Harry, at a time like this.

The crowd became electrified with sharp intakes of breath and subdued speaking at the sight of Madam Adonna’s altered face. Was this how Harry Potter could be alive? They all seemed to be thinking.

“Truth being stranger than fiction,” shouted Harry over the din, “Ministry locked the healer up in St. Mungo’s not because of her message, but because of her image. The very image they condemned her to keep, after prematurely severing the Gemini Stasis Charm between her and the wizard boy.”

Exclamations of outrage once again started permeating the air, but it was in defence of someone, rather than accusation. “They made her look like Harry” a few said, “so she’d have to look that way forever?” others asked.

“Not even the wizard boy’s soul knew that he wasn’t dead.”

Automatically the crowd hushed themselves again, finally getting the point it would be better to just listen to Harry’s story. Truth be told, it was a bit surreal to explain this part of things to everybody, but it had to be done. Harry’s story format of third-person speaking thankfully made it somewhat easier.

“His spirit was roving around London, and inadvertently came across his funeral here in the graveyard tonight.”

People became even more subdued at this. They couldn’t imagine what it was like for someone to witness their own funeral.

“A few of his friends in the graveyard found the soul of this wizard, after everybody else had left. Not even the spirit of this boy could bring himself to believe he wasn’t dead.” Harry walked up to his proud

circle of friends, “‘What if?’ his friends began to wonder anyway,” Harry continued, omitting the details of the gift box. “‘What if you’re not really dead?’ they told him.”

Harry whirled back around to face the assembly again. “Eight teenagers helped the wizard’s spirit find his body,” as he paced around the stage, “thereby proving something he himself could not believe.”

For the first time since starting this charade, Harry faltered. He had just caught sight of Cedric Diggory’s mother and father in the crowd. Scarcely allowing himself to think why they were here, he shut his eyes and drew strength from the assembly. Cedric might be gone, but Harry determined in some small way that he could make it up to his parents by going through with this ceremony.

Much more humbly, but no less meaningfully, Harry projected, “The wizard’s body was found, but it wasn’t a happy occasion. He’d been starved, tortured, alone, and left for dead. In fact, he was so far gone, the wizard boy’s spirit swore it was impossible to bring him back.”

Harry looked down and pressed his lips together for a moment and looked back to Hagrid and Lupin. They gazed back at him intently as Harry still continued. “He was wrong, however,” he said, resuming his pacing.

“Two of his most trusted friends, men whom most of you refer to as beasts,” he clipped the last word to the crowd, “healed the wizard’s body and reclaimed it from certain death. If it weren’t for these men,” Harry enunciated and aimed his hand pointedly, “the wizard would not have his body to go back to.”

Harry turned to Dumbledore, who had been observing him with characteristic attention, but also a certain...fatherly pride. The headmaster seemed to have anticipated Harry’s request as they both went over to Harry’s body on the platform. Donnie sank back down and removed the Invisibility Cloak from around Jamie and the professor helped to reposition him to be supported and half-sitting up against Adonna’s chest. Harry’s voice had roused him, just as it had in the chamber. Jamie stared out at all of the gathered people, darting

looks around fearfully. Rippling sounds of more shock and wonder emanated from the crowd. It was impossible for Harry not to read the one dominant thought: He's alive!

"Yes," Harry answered them all intently. "Harry Potter. although divided, still lives. And it is entirely attributable to a motley crew of school children, deviants, and people whom the Ministry calls savages," he nearly choked on that last word. "People who, like me, are more than used to having others not listen to what they have to say. People who are accustomed to being thought of as weird or mental."

Harry brought everybody in with a sweeping gesture, making sure to address the main who spurred this thing on. "You even called Professor Dumbledore 'insane' over this. So, I ask you all now, why are you here?"

Murmurs started at this as people seemed to want to answer him. "Don't be shy," Harry said, "why are you all here?"

The man answered him again, much more timidly, "We're here for you , Mr. Potter." And everybody else gave various signs of agreement, whether it be through word or action.

"Me," replied Harry, a bit disbelievingly, "a person whom the Ministry declared a murderous raving lunatic?" This is for you, Sirius, thought Harry toward the heavens. "Me, not only a convict who should be in Azkaban, but also happens to be legally dead?"

Again the affirmative answers from the crowd reached him on the platform.

So Harry smiled and proclaimed with grim amusement, "Well then, if you ask me, we're all bloody crazy."

Dear Readers,

I know that yesterday, I told a few of you that number 24 was to be the final chapter of Harry Gets Even, and it seemed my intention to make it so. Welllllll...I lied. Hehehe. Once again, more than I'd anticipated flowed forth from my fingertips, and I hope you like the results.

Thank you so very very very (did I say very?) much to all who reviewed..I am quite frankly blown away with the number of reviews I've managed to get in the past while.

Thanks also to all who proofed and beta'd last chapters...people helping me to do this round the clock, so I could post chapters as soon and as fast as possible. I couldn't do this without you. As this chapter was largely written when even my wonderful betas weren't available, I have decided to post it on good faith...without having people pre-check it first. I can't wait that long! (SOB!) Oooh, dangerous ground. Forgive me if there's anything lousy in this chapter. Enjoy, Rae ;)

P.S. I really didn't have time to find the "ultimate" song for this chapter, as I originally thought the format would be somewhat different, so please bear with the song I have chosen for now. I hope it fits, lol.

BREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAK

A smattering of glad laughter sang through the gathering with Harry's pronouncement. Indeed, according to Ministry, everyone in the entire cemetery should be chucked into the nearest loony bin, and Harry had efficiently reminded them of it. He even heard Hermione's happiness above everybody else's, and it made him grin at her.

Still, it rankled Harry that he had to use himself as the example; it felt hopelessly egotistical. Regardless, it seemed to be the sole thing stopping the crowd from rioting over trivial nonsense. And if that was the case, Harry was sure as Salazar going to use it.

"Our wizard's story is not over, however," he picked up. "Depending upon forthcoming decision from each of you, you're all entitled to a

part in how this turns out.” Harry nodded to Dumbledore and said, “For the Professor assures me this is no ordinary wandlighting ceremony being performed tonight,’ and the headmaster inclined his head in acquiescence. “Each of your wands is as a key to a door. Keys that push aside pins to unlock a type of gateway that will allow spirit and body to reconcile again.” Now it was time to address the nitty-gritty issues.

Harry continued, “I am also told the only way for this to happen is if nobody here has a single shred of doubt within them. I assure you, fear can be dealt with. After all, wanting to feel safe is natural. But if you truly claim to be here for the wizard boy, then you must also bide by what, but most importantly who he chooses to believe in.”

It certainly would make all the difference in the world to Jamie; truly the only people on the whole of the earth he trusted at the moment were Hagrid and Remus.

“And if any of you finds yourself incapable of handling this, then by all means go. Leave. We don’t want you or your intolerance here.” Many stirred at Harry’s frankness, but nary a single person left the graveyard.

“By being here tonight, each of you has already shown that you have a desire to find the truth. You chose to believe in the wizard boy in spite of all the Ministry claimed he did, and were consequently rewarded with the evidence. That above all else should tell you that you can’t believe everything you hear from the authorities. You need to show the wizard boy that same hope by way of supporting his friends,” Harry gestured to Jamie, “because if you don’t, he’ll know. I’ll know. Prove to us that your quest for truth does not end here, it starts here!”

Harry’s voice rang through the clearing, and for a long drawn-out moment, quiet shock was the only thing that answered him.

Suddenly, distinct twin voices called out from behind him, “Long live Harry Potter!” Harry whirled around. There could be no mistake—it was Fred and George.

Then a second voice, just as strong, called out from the opposite side of the clearing, “Long live Harry’s friends!” Harry hurriedly looked back over his shoulder. Amos Diggory had his hands cupped around his mouth, and nodded once to Harry as he’d turned around.

Thus started the championing cry of the crowd. More people from the twins’ side joined in, “Long live Harry Potter!” only to be answered from still more voices from opposite them, “Long live Harry’s friends!”

And so it continued, everybody eventually joining in mind-blowing chorus of both phrases, “Long live Harry Potter, long live Harry’s friends!”

Harry stood there in the midst of it all, dazed by the frenzy of activity he’d managed to instigate. Or to redirect, at any rate. He felt equally sure it should somehow feel wrong or completely uncharacteristic of him, but it didn’t. Harry had simply done what he always did; the only thing he knew how to do—that which he knew was right.

“Long live Harry Potter, love live Harry’s friends!”

The enthusiasm the crowds were displaying shouldn’t just be for him and his friends on the dias, however. Hermione looked longingly up at him and he motioned with both hands for her to come up the steps. She nodded with a huge smile and grabbed a protesting Ron, who in turn grabbed Fred, whom George followed up the steps of the platform.

“Long live Harry Potter, love live Harry’s friends!”

As a sign of faith for the gathering, the perimeter of students around Lupin and Hagrid split up to motion still other teenagers from among the masses. Before long, every single acting member of the D.A. was standing with Harry on the platform. Hermione made her way over to him, Ron and the twins in tow.

“Harry, do you have any idea what you just did?” She was shouting over the roar of the crowd. All non-ghosts were half-covering their ears; apparently the noise was near deafening. People had started to throw their fists into the air.

“Long live Harry Potter, love live Harry’s friends!”

“Stopped a rabble from attacking Remus and Hagrid?” he yelled back at her, as Hermione shook her head.

She replied laughingly, “No! You just gave your first public speech, and you did it extemporaneously!” The girl stood there and positively beamed at him.

Harry shared a look with Ron, and both boys screwed up their faces in wry amusement. They should’ve known the only way Harry would ever be able to do public speaking without stuttering or saying “errrrm” even once would be over his own dead body. Or almost dead body, anyway. Ron sniggered with his brothers in spite of everything.

“Long live Harry Potter, love live Harry’s friends!”

Harry called back to Hermione, “Extemp—WHAT?” Again she just shook her head and grinned.

Everybody on the dias was slowly making their way over to Dumbledore who had lit the tip of his wand. They all tried to acknowledge Harry in some way; catching his eye, giving a thumbs-up, and various other mannerisms.

A weepy-eyed Hagrid was lost beyond words as he bent over and gave Harry a one-armed hug. Remus, deprived of putting a hand on Harry’s shoulder earlier that night, was able to do the action this time. He leaned over and said, “I told you before that your mother always had a way of seeing the beauty in people, even when they couldn’t see it in themselves. I now know that is another enviable trait your share with her.”

“Long live Harry Potter, love live Harry’s friends!”

Harry’s eyebrows crinkled as he answered in puzzlement, “It’s nothing for you to envy, Remus. You do the same thing. Didn’t you know?”

Obviously Lupin hadn't known, if Harry went by the startled look that sprang to the former professor's face. He cocked a half-smile at Harry and amazedly walked away.

Ginny and Harry also shared a look. Just as she was about to go back down the steps, she saluted to him with her wand and assuredly said, "Never forget." He nodded to her, as that seemed be the only thing to do.

Gradually the crowd subdued themselves, watching as all of the people on the dias touched their wands to one another's. They were chanting something in Latin, but Harry couldn't quite make out what they were saying over the other yelling.

Apparently, it was always part of the ceremony for the D.A. members to walk out to the audience and pass the light. Dumbledore, Donnie, Jamie, and Harry were the only ones left on the platform as everyone else chose a different section of the crowd's circle, and the wands were lit and the chant passed to the outer-most members of the assembly.

One by one the wand tips were ignited and the clearing was filled with an otherworldly incandescence, and Harry could finally make out the chant: "Lumen naturale et spiritu de veritate."

"What does it mean, Professor?" he asked Dumbledore as it the words were repeated over and over, with more and more feeling each time.

"It is meant to evoke all of the things of Harry Potter that are best shared," the headmaster told him with bright eyes. "Translation: 'natural light and spirit of truth.'"

Taken back, Harry realised that his earlier assumption that the wizard community trusted his words above Fudge's was indeed the case. That didn't make it any less incredible, however.

"Why did...that epitaph...read how it did?" Switching gears now, Harry still needed an answer to this question. It was hardly comforting

when one had the words “loved by no one” inscribed on their headstone.

Dumbledore’s lips tightened very slightly before he replied, “This was Ministry’s last punishment to you. By not allowing you a proper wizard burial, they hoped to tell the community they considered you dead to the whole of wizard kind. The final insult, if you will,” he said quietly. “It was never in our minds to follow their intended destination for you, however. It was only made known to a handful, but you were never meant to be left here. That information was going to be passed on at the ceremony tomorrow night. Your final resting place was always to be the one locale you’ve considered your home; at Hogwarts, Harry,” concluded the elder man, as a wave deepest understanding passed between them..

It made sense now...all of the coldness and lack of feeling that he’d noticed whilst coming across his funeral earlier. Ministry’s parting shot...how fitting of them.

The ceremony they were witnessing now was the exact opposite, thankfully. In fact, Harry fancied it as a type of anti-funeral instead.

The crowd’s wandlight had grown and swelled to create a dome-like effect over everyone, encompassing them all within its warm reaches. Still the inspiring chant continued as everybody held their wands high into the air.

Unexpectedly, a bolt of energy arced across the clearing and connected two wand tips together. But it wasn’t a still light; it spun about, rippled, and seemed almost alive. Nobody looked to be too alarmed though. Indeed, it appeared to be the affect they wanted to achieve all along.

Harry watched as the arcing ribbons of energy occurred again and again, until the ignited wands shared their light and glowing streamers crisscrossed in patterns above them all. It was truly beautiful beyond description.

At last the anticipated moment had arrived. Since Adonna had performed the Gemini Stasis Charm on Harry with her wand and the

charm was severed with Voldemort's, it made sense that the headmaster was going to perform a double Priori Incantatem spell on both of the wands. If Harry and Madam were to travel back into the past, the broken charm not only needed reversal. The exact same charm needed to be completely reinstated.

As Harry made his way over to Jamie and the healer, he could finally see what had gone on during the overpoweringly emotional actions of the crowd members.

Even though he could not see her, an otherwise fearful Jamie had latched onto Donnie's supporting hands across his chest.

For a frozen moment, one that should have been surreal in the extreme, Harry just...watched himself holding onto Adonna for dear life. Rather than being weirded out, he thought it was the most natural thing in the world for Jamie to do. And he also knew precisely why.

Donnie spoke up shyly and a tad concernedly, "I've tried to get him to, but he won't let go."

Harry smiled softly and answered her, "That's because he knows exactly who you are. He can feel it, even without seeing you. We've done this before, remember?"

In an expression long familiar to Harry, Adonna's eyebrows raised at him hopefully as her eyes widened in comprehension. The night of the crash, were the words that passed between them.

Regrettably, the only means Harry had to release Jamie's hold on Donnie was to remove his gloves. Slowly, he did just that, and knelt down next to Jamie and the healer.

As reached out to impel Jamie to release his grip from the healer, Harry found his hands came in actual physical contact with theirs. Jamie did instantly let go of Adonna's hand, but it wasn't because of the biting cold of the Poltergeist effect. It was because he'd reached out and wanted to seize Harry's hand instead.

Harry had about three seconds to stare in utter shock and amazement as he whispered incredulously, “What in the nine phases of the moon—“

Suddenly, he was pulled once more into the unknown.

Dear Readers,

Well, this time I didn't lie. Chapter 25 is the really, really final chapter of Harry Gets Even Part I. It is also longer than average length, to satiate the voracious appetites of you ravenous fic munchers!

Just in case people don't like the ending, I have packed up my belongings and such, prepared to go into the "Ficness Protection Programme."

After posting bite-sized chapters, a few disturbed readers gave me the e-quivalent of ransom notes, 'I know where you fic' letters, and e-bomb threats. Honestly, just give it time. I swear you'll get what's coming to you, just give me a chance! (Uncontrollable sobbing ensues here.)

I have already placed an afterward on at the end, so without further ado, I present...The Final Chapdown...(cheesy 80s theme ensues here.) Lurve and Enjoy, Rae ;)

BREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAK

How can a person be a Portkey? was the irrational thought that sprang to Harry's mind, before realising the sensations he currently felt were nothing of the sort. Something big was happening, though he could scarcely discern what. It was clear that Madam Adonna was somehow caught up in the midst of it, too.

"Give me your other hand," she said with utmost urgency, "and be quick! Do it now!" It was practically an order, and her tone was such that Harry reached out for Donnie's free hand before full thought for the act even registered.

The healer made a heart-wrenching noise between a sob and a gasp as they completed the action. Before Harry could ask what was going on, he saw Madam throw her head forward, so that it was buried in the back of Jamie's shoulder. Her long raven hair spilled over her face and for a time, the only indicator that Donnie was still conscious was her laboured breathing.

Astonishedly, Harry watched her hair change to a deep of shade chocolate, shorten slightly and curl as he also felt Donnie drawing something out from him. Madam's hands had also begun shifting in appearance; the fingers grew longer and more slender, the nails more sculpted, and her skin softer and more rosy. Harry was equally sure the rest of the healer's body was undergoing a similar transformation, as he finally grasped the full realisation of what she was doing. Madam Adonna had found her transfiguration ability again.

She didn't stop at gathering her morphing ability, however. Adonna had also started to draw Jamie's physical pain away from him. Having barely recovered from the Veritaserum, Harry knew that the healer's already overtaxed systems could hardly handle this type of thing, but she was doing it anyway. Harry tried telling her to please stop, she was only hurting herself needlessly, but something prevented him from speaking.

The entirety of the combination transfiguration-transference lasted perhaps a minute; Adonna slouched lower and lower to the dias as it was completed. Finally, she just collapsed fully. Harry crawled over to her across the stage as Jamie extricated himself from Madam's arms.

Harry and his other half were so caught up in their situation, they both failed to notice that everyone else around them had become completely still; their ecliptical gateway had become partially opened. The two boys and Adonna were the only ones able to move in this otherwise frozen moment in time.

As Harry bent around Donnie, he saw she again had a woman's profile, a woman's face.... Harry attempted to speak to the healer again, to ask if she was all right, but still found himself unable to do so.

"Be good to him," Donnie smiled weakly and told Harry, "he doesn't understand yet." Then she blacked out altogether. Still it was good to hear her speak in her own contralto once more...it fit her so well.

An amazed Harry looked up at an amazed Jamie. Jamie had actually managed to pull himself off the platform and stand up without

assistance at all. Regardless, the novelty quickly wore off as Jamie remembered who was with him.

Harry watched the requisite loathing and hatred contort his twin's features, as he got good and angry with Harry yet again. Jamie's fists contracted and he commenced shaking in fury over a kneeling Harry; it didn't take a telepath or a genius to guess what was going to happen next. Harry shut his eyes tight and braced for impact.

WHAM. With strength worthy of a pile driver, Harry felt Jamie's backhand fist strike him fully across the face. Harry spun sideways and his glasses snapped only to fly off his nose. Fireworks blossomed behind his vision and as the taste of copper filled his mouth, it was only Quidditch-ingrained reflex which prevented him from hitting ground. Ginny was right—he did pack quite a punch. Big-time ouch.

Harry would've laughed at the irony; all of his missing mortal senses were at last returning to him again, and he had happily welcomed any and all lost sensation. This still held true even if his own counterpart chose to inflict physical pain. It was almost funny, having made it this far only to fail at the hands of his doppelganger. Although Jamie didn't know it, this was one time Harry knew he dared not fight back. Again he would have laughed, but Harry could make no sound come out of his throat. His voice had simply left him completely.

Carefully, Harry pushed himself back to kneeling position and threw his hair from his eyes. Jamie's eyes sparked with chartreuse flame and blind rage. Harry prepared himself for another blow.

"WHY DID YOU HAVE TO LEAVE!" Jamie screamed excruciatingly to a shocked Harry. Leave? thought Harry. Leave what? Leave whom, where? he wanted to he knew where his voice had gone; Adonna must have somehow transferred it to Jamie, and he was making full use of the switch.

Rather than hitting him again, Jamie whipped around so his back was toward Harry. The angry boy appeared to be struggling greatly with his emotions. Harry watched the taught fury ease from his shoulders to be replaced with disparaging weariness.

"No," Jamie said to himself, "I will not hit—no. I'm not like them." Harry had a mental picture of the Dursleys flash across his mind as Jamie personally resolved to not strike him anymore.

He turned back around and said to Harry sorrowfully, "I already know why you left me, you know. He told me why—Snake Eyes did. He told me it was because you hated my weakness." Jamie got a catch in his throat and nearly broke down, "He told me how you got mad and were better off without me. And he was right. I mean, look at you now." Tears glistened in Jamie's pain-filled eyes. "No wonder you rejected me," he whispered disconsolately, wiping his nose across his sleeve.

No, I didn't! I would never do that! Harry eyes widened as he tried desperately to yell aloud. He hadn't wanted to leave, anyway...it just sort of happened. And Jamie used the term 'Snake Eyes'. With only Voldemort for company, Jamie's unbeguiled, simplistic mind had been exploited and filled with utter lies. Harry gritted his teeth. What else had the serpentine man been telling him?

"I'm sorry. For disappointing you," choked out Jamie. "Snake Eyes hurt me bad after you left. Real bad, in here."

Jamie held a hand up to the lighting bolt scar on his forehead. For Harry, observing him speak was like listening to a 5-year-old version of himself. "And I already missed you so much," Jamie's face twisted with the memory, "but I knew you wouldn't want to come back. Not to me, not ever. That's why I started trying to...not...live... anymore."

Jamie peeled back his sleeves and looked down at his arms, swathed in Remus's bandaging. It was over the agony of being forced to live without your soul...

Harry's facial expression now mirrored Jamie's. Finally, he was beginning to comprehend why Jamie had done what he'd done. The worst part of it was that he essentially had no way of conveying reception of the message to his double. It was flat out cruel. Harry felt his own eyes start to fill with tears at the unfairness of it all. To be so close, and yet so far...

“Why won’t you talk to me? Do you still hate me that much, even now?” Jamie asked him devastatingly. He managed to look even more crushed, as if that were possible.

Briefly throwing his arms outward in supplication, Harry shook his head vehemently. All of these new gifts Harry had at his disposal, yet he would trade them all in an instant if he could just find the means to...speak to himself. Tears of pure frustration began leaking from Harry’s eyes and he buried his face in his hands. You didn’t fail me, he thought at Jamie as loudly as he could, it’s just the opposite.

Subtle nuances of body language and facial expression may have escaped Jamie’s level of comprehension, but he did understand one thing. He knew that Harry’s tears were bad, and that he was hurting inside. As a result, Harry found comfort and reassurance in the most unimaginable place possible.

“What’s wrong?” Harry’s twin inquired, concernedly. “Is it that you can’t speak?”

Yes! Harry mouthed the word to Jamie. He scarcely believed his twin had managed to figure out his dilemma.

“So then, you do wish to talk to me?”

The tone of hopefulness in Jamie’s voice sliced Harry to the quick. Only more than anything. Not knowing how else to express himself, Harry nodded up at Jamie, and mouthed the word, “please.”

Indeed, the word seemed to carry a magical connotation as Jamie knelt on the platform in front of Harry, carefully making sure he was level with him.

“We can do this, then!” A completely unanticipated streak of enthusiasm lit up Jamie’s face as he smiled blindingly. “It’s okay, you don’t have to be sad. You don’t only just talk from here, you know,” he said, pointing to Harry’s throat. “You can talk like I do,” then he pointed to the centre of his chest, “from here. I’ll show you how.”

Harry paid rapt attention as his twin astoundingly taught him a thing or two about nonverbal communication.

“First,” began Jamie, “you have to listen and know who you’re speaking to inside.”

Reaching out for Harry’s hand, Jamie placed it palm flat, against his own sternum. “You don’t have to do this, but it usually helps you concentrate. Close your eyes, ‘cause it helps you hear the beat.”

Harry shut his eyes and just focussed on Jamie’s heartbeat, as his double began to tap the rhythm against the back of his hand. Harry concentrated fully and lost himself within Jamie’s internal percussion. As he did, a voice seemed to spring up from this carnal quasi-music; it sounded like a cross between the roaring of a lion and...Buckbeak’s cry in flight.

Harry’s eyes snapped open and he found Jamie staring at him attentively. “Did you hear it?” Harry’s twin asked him excitedly. Harry nodded with equal enthusiasm as Jamie inquired, “And do you know what it was?” Harry shook his head.

“A griffin,” answered Jamie, and struggled to find another term, “Griffin...Pride...Pride Master—protector.”

If Harry had ever wanted unshakable evidence that he was indeed a Gryffindor, the proof had just been presented to him. He’d take the title of “Pride Master” over “Prime Minister” any day.

“This is how I spoke to the Pack Master,” Jamie elaborated as a picture of Remus blazed through Harry’s mind. “I was afraid when he was touching my cuts, so his—he called himself ‘Alpha’—Alpha told me it was okay, because he’d hurt himself before too, and that he was only trying to help.” Harry vividly recalled Jamie’s tracing of Lupin’s scars in the chamber.

“He considers me—well, you—” Jamie’s face showed confusion at trying to figure it all out, “—he considers us to be his cub—cubs. He’s a protector, too.” As fascinating as it was to listen to Jamie explain his

means of communication, Harry was just as eager for his lesson to continue.

“I’ll let you just listen now,” continued Jamie, still holding Harry’s hand to his chest.

Closing his eyes once more, Harry again let himself sink into shared rhythm. As he did, a series of images opened itself to him. It was literally like switching channels on a television remote, as he could flip through and focus on that which he chose...

Jamie wanting to walk out of the chamber and show Harry that he was still strong and worthy, to make him proud...Voldemort repeatedly scouring his twin with a psychic Cruciatus Curse, even when he was too weak to stand...being lied to by the snake-eyed man over and over...shivering because of the surroundings and dementors...cold, so cold...Wormtail choking off Jamie’s throat and throwing him to the ground—Jamie had fractured his ankle and re-cracked two ribs upon impact—it made Harry wince...and Jamie’s crying, weeping in utter despair, certain that his soul would never come back...such intense pain, not coming back...Jamie’s meaning for life and all reason for living it had simply evaporated by the necessity of Harry’s temporary departure. How could Harry have ever thought him weak? Tears of remorse threatened to spill from his eyes.

And yet how had he treated Jamie when they found him in the chamber? Harry had rejected him outright, just as Voldemort had intended. Jamie was many things, but stupid was definitely not one of them. Considering the source, it made perfect sense Harry’s opposite knew implied abandonment when he saw it. It was no mystery Jamie couldn’t stand to hear his own name and later struck Harry out of sheer hatred. Harry would’ve been furious beyond all reason, too.

Something gave him even greater pause than this, however. In times of greatest agony, the times when Jamie had attempted suicide—and consequently times Harry had originally mistaken for insanity—somebody else had been with him in his prison. Voldemort would push Jamie to the edge again and again, not only revengefully but in attempt to lure Jamie’s soul back to him...for without Harry, Jamie had no real means of self-defence. But when Harry’s double found

his only action was to let go and plunge for darkness, someone had caught and held on for him. Harry zeroed in on one incident in particular...

“YOU! NOT AGAIN! YOU MEDDLESOME GIRL, STAND ASIDE!” loudly shrieked an ethereal image of the Dark Lord in the chamber.

“NO!” answered back a very real, very solid Lily Potter.

Harry’s mother was the very vision of angelic personified. She was on the floor cradling and covering a bleeding Jamie within the folds of her voluminous glowing robes.

“That only worked the first time, Tom! I cannot, and I will not leave him anymore! It’s you who must do as I command! Now depart, and leave my Jamie alone!”

It was only then that Harry learned the true value of blood protection, for Voldemort had no choice but to obey Lily. His apparition fumed, lingered for a few seconds and finally vapourised.

Looking down into Jamie’s face, Lily soothingly told him, “It’s okay Jamie. He’s gone for now. Look into mum’s eyes, just keep looking—that’s it...and I can help you hold on...just hang on and look at me....”

Harry wept with the knowledge that somebody had been there to protect him in the chamber, even if for small amounts of time. He should have guessed his mother would never abandon him in his darkest hour...he should have known. And what was it she’d called Harry? She addressed him as Jamie, because she knew being associated with his spirit had been too painful to bear.

The connection slowly ebbed as Jamie disengaged Harry’s hand from against his chest.

“I think that’s enough listening for now,” he told Harry seriously and patted his hands as a small child would. “Sometimes this hurts people more than others. You need a break, I think,” and he nodded knowingly.

It surprised Harry to see Jamie acting almost...parental towards him. Harry had come to the cemetery tonight fully expecting to be the educator, not the educated. On the other hand, just as Harry considered Jamie the more needy half of him, Jamie had considered Harry the lost one; wayward spirit who needed the most help or assistance. The Prodigal Soul, Harry thought to himself, ironically.

After Harry was able to compose himself, Jamie proclaimed it was Harry's turn to try and "talk" his way. To better facilitate this, he had placed his hand against Harry's chest as well as placing Harry's hand on his.

Ever the instructor, his double still personally held Harry's hand up to his sternum, as he said, "Okay, now this will make it easier since I'm going to be listening to you. Please tell me everything, I'm quite good at it."

Harry smiled at him. Of course Jamie was good at it—it had been his sole means of communicating until...just how much time had elapsed since they'd started, anyway?

Concentrating fully once more, Harry felt his innermost being read by his twin. Rather than feeling invasive, it was calming, reassuring...it felt good, as if he'd come up from going far too long without air. Jamie wasn't kidding when he said he was good at this. He was practised enough at it to punctuate the experience with pointed comments as well as continuously keep listening to Harry.

Within the first five seconds, Jamie's eyes opened wide and he sucked in a breath through his teeth. "Shadow phoenix," he diagnosed about what he sensed within Harry, "hissing phoenix," then he concluded his sentence by saying, "wounded phoenix," in Parseltongue.

Instead of being alarming, the hissing words were as a healing salve to Harry as Jamie closed his eyes again and continued in snake language, "He hurt you, too. In here. I'm sorry."

He and Harry recommenced their sharing, and just as Jamie said, Harry told him everything. Harry told him about the Fright Bus, about

his leaving it, and how he didn't know he was dead, finding people hurting and mourning for him in the graveyard. Jamie tensed a lot during this.

Harry then sensed his twin's inward smile as his teenage friends had summoned him in the graveyard, dashed through London, and came to St. Mungo's. He practically fainted with joy as he watched Harry blast the chamber door open, and he exclaimed, "You did that for me!" Harry grinned and nodded affirmation.

As he watched the memory of the dementors according to Harry's recollection, something about Jamie's character changed entirely. He watched the soulless creatures fight with Harry's friends, how Harry hadn't even been able to defend himself... Harry couldn't describe Jamie's reaction anymore accurately than saying it was a mental click of a missing piece slide into place.

"You couldn't stop them, just like me!" Jamie dropped his hands and cried out in utter horror. "If I was with you then, we couldn't have stopped them! That's why you had to leave! The dementors were going to get you!"

Jamie leaned forward and seized him in a fierce embrace as Harry nodded to him once more.

"I'm sorry, I should have known you'd never leave me on purpose," sobbed Jamie, holding him as closely as possible, echoing certain thoughts Harry had about Lily earlier.

"To think those dementors would have got you, and you'd be gone forever...what would I do then?" Jamie then buried his head into Harry's shoulder and cried as if he would never stop.

Trepidaciously, Harry hugged Jamie in return, half-sure he was going mad. Jamie had been overcome by what he had seen, and responded to the situation just as someone ten years younger than Harry would have. It was appropriate, considering Harry felt to have aged a good decade in the past two weeks.

So the twins held each other in the balance, neither alive nor dead, mortal nor immortal, yet unable to heal or progress without the other. Be good to him, Adonna had said.

As a last-ditch effort, Harry tried speaking aloud once more. "It's all right," he reassured Jamie softly, "I'm here now...."

Suddenly, their memories began to blend into one...sweet phoenix song swirled around them...

He tried to kill Harry Potter and me!...It's all right, I heard you and I'm listening...He left you because he hates your weakness, you know...Harry, Ministry says you wanted to kill the Dursleys...Wantittohappen!...Maybe you're not really dead...Harry James Potter!...Stand aside, girl!...NO!...Who's your friend?...That's where the Imperius Curse comes in...TEN DAYS you made us feel this way!...EXPECTO PATRONUM!...Dear lord, is he...Why won't he die? How can you stand there and profess that you should feel nothing?...Just do it! Go!...I can see where you end and he begins...What is wrong with her?...You're a Psychromancer now Harry, the most powerful one ever known...you're a true changeling, due to your godfather's defence of you...the ones who love us never truly leave us...the romance part Harry, she knows it too...the memories you've held within you have no place in the flesh...but I don't want to forget!...you are stronger than you can possibly imagine...So, now we're even...Kill him...back down, I beg you...Harry Potter is not dead!...we don't want you nor your intolerance...prove your quest for truth does not end here, it starts here!...Long live Harry Potter, long live Harry's friends!...Lumen naturale et spiritu de veritate...Never forget....

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Slowly Harry came around, only to find he was face-down and clutching a piece of shimmery white fabric. He also felt very, very tired...almost sick in a way, but it was still good somehow. It was akin to the feeling he got after playing freezing cold Quidditch match in the rain proceeded by thawing out in front of the Gryffindor common room fireplace. The pins and needles feeling hurt like crazy, but the warm

flame, squashy armchairs, and hot chocolate helped that horrible sensation ease away quickly.

Harry had just been in the middle of a very bittersweet dream, but the scenes seemed to be fading away more quickly than he could grasp them. Achingly, he rolled himself over.

Staring above him, he saw beautiful rainbow patterns of light. The ribbons of energy almost rivalled aurora borealis. The sight of them stirred something within his mind.... But his vision wouldn't seem to clear up, annoyingly. Several familiar faces swam into focus, hovering into his field of view. A calm, yet concerned voice inquired, "Harry, are you all right? How do you feel?"

Shading his face with a hand, Harry replied wearily, "Almost like I've fallen off a broom at a thousand metres," and a few chuckles answered him. "Why? How should I feel? What happened...R-Remus?"

Woah, that felt...strange. Since when had Harry started addressing Professor Lupin by his first name? Fortunately, the man didn't seem to mind; it made him smile, in fact. Harry gradually sat up, circle of his friends still gazing at him with faces full of deep concern.

"What happened?" he repeated, getting a titch unnerved by all the attention. "You guys all look like somebody just died or something," said Harry lightly, attempting to improve the rather sombre mood that seemed to have eclipsed them all. Nobody laughed that time. It made him feel quite uneasy.

"Harry, we can't explain everything now. I hate to rush you, but time is really of the essence," Remus—no, Professor Lupin told him.

He held out his hands and assisted Harry to his feet. Without thinking, Harry went to take a step, but as he did, pain shot through his right ankle and he nearly crumpled back to—what was he standing on, anyway?

"Been walking long, Potter?" he muttered abashedly as Fred and George caught him before he could fall all over himself. "Thanks," he

said sheepishly as the twins nodded and stepped back from him again.

When they had, Harry noticed throngs and throngs of people surrounding them on...a stage? Harry and his friends were on a stage? He was sure he'd dreamt the whole thing.... What were all these people doing here watching them? Slipping into near panic mode, Harry demanded, "What is going on? It was a...dream...just dreams, wasn't it?" He held a hand to his forehead in effort to stave his racing memories and heart.

Harry was hopelessly confused. Had his death, his sentencing to Azkaban, torture...not been a nightmare after all? Everybody kept soothing him and offering reassurance—especially Remus, Dumbledore, and Mrs. Weasley. It didn't seem to be helping, however. Seeing the crowds had violently awakened something inside of Harry that just wouldn't be abated.

Suddenly, in the midst of all the voices...he discerned one that he knew should be there, but wasn't. He turned around, motioned Dumbledore aside, and finally figured out who it was.

Ginny Weasley was standing alone on a corner of the vast platform, her back toward him. Harry gritted his teeth and painfully limped in her direction, stopping about two metres away. Something about the dark red stain on the back of her hair screamed the word catalyst! at him but he hadn't the faintest idea why. He also didn't know the reason he said to her gently, "Tiger lily."

She froze at the sound of his voice so close to her, and turned around to look at him with luminous pain-filled eyes. The expression on her face made Harry go all mooshy inside and he inched still closer to her. Then another phrase came to Harry and he said transfixedly, "Never forget."

Ginny blinked back tears and nodded at him. Struggling for means to ease the girl's suffering, Harry was filled with an overwhelming need to just...kiss it better.

Therefore, he proceeded to do just that. Harry cupped Ginny's chin in his hand, closed his eyes, and tenderly kissed Ginerva Molly Weasley full on the lips in front of Godric and everyone. Twice.

Each time, more memories of what had happened about the last two weeks returned to his mind. Amazing what can happen all with a simple little kiss. Hmmm. All right, maybe the second one wasn't so little. Okay, nor was the first.

"Now we're even," he smiled and told her softly.

Ginny sniffled. Harry's eyelids flew open as he said in total dismay, "Oh no. Not you, too! I must be Georgie Porgie incarnate! What happened? Did I do it all wrong?"

The wide-eyed girl looked at him and stuttered, "Georgie w-who? W-what?"

"Georgie—oh, never mind. It's a Muggle thing. Just tell me, do they have monasteries in the wizard world? Because the next time I kiss a girl and she cries, I swear by all that's Harry that I'm booking a spot—"

Unexpectedly, she threw herself around Harry's neck and pulled him into another kiss. Finally she drew away, eyes twinkling, "Shut up, Potter," Ginny said through clenched teeth, trying not to smile, "you're embarrassing yourself."

Then Harry suddenly remembered exactly where he was, and exactly what he had just done in front of them all. Harry was certain he'd never blushed such a spectacular shade of red in his whole life. Thankfully, nobody said anything sarcastic though. Not even Ron or the twins. Each person on the dias and in the audience seemed content to just let he and Ginny be happy, if more than a bit humiliated. Harry had never seen such a collection of people smiling at him before.

"I think it's time for you to go," reminded Ginny reluctantly after a short time. "Donnie's waiting."

“Right,” said Harry, turning and looking at the healer curled up on the platform. He didn’t want to go, but he needed to, seeing as how he was currently on borrowed strength from someone else to begin with. Somehow Adonna had known the only way for Harry to rejoin his body was to force he and Jamie into seeing things from the other’s point of view. It was no secret to Harry the best thing to help him look past his own pain was by seeing somebody else that was hurting more, and Jamie had reacted precisely the same way.

Harry and Donnie had also only completed stage one of their manoeuver. There was still no telling how much he and Madam might be able to remember, but the latest happenings gave him a new spark of hope. Harry had, with Jamie’s help, managed to keep most of it together and beat the odds yet again. With hand to his heart, Harry reverently saluted the child inside him.

Haltingly, he walked back over, knelt down and carefully leaned Donnie against him the same way she had leaned Jamie against her own chest. “Thank you,” he told the sleeping healer.

Heart starting to race again, Harry held his and Donnie’s arms up together, wands raised to the sky. It was ultimate irony that he was using Voldemort’s wand, ultimate irony that he was still alive because of it. After all, it had been one of the biggest keys to finding the clues...

“Ready?” asked Dumbledore eagerly.

“Yes, all set.”

“Priori Incantatem!” the headmaster said, even more loudly as it was two wands that needed his influencing this time.

The two wands sprayed forth their phantom spells, but instead of ending shortly after the tips, the power was drawn upward.

Twin bolts of magical power spiralled together and pierced the centre of the aurora-dome, and a colossal column of light erupted from within and poured upward to the stars. Harry chanted to himself over and over, “Never forget, wantittohappen...”

Quite fittingly, he and Adonna disappeared from sight in a blazing flare of light.

>..>..>..>..>..>

Anybody who looked outside and happened to have a view overlooking that section of London that night would have seen what looked like a combination of several multi-thousand candlewatt search beacons in the distance, pointing straight into the sky.

Had the wandlighting ceremony not been a success, Dumbledore still had ready the precise manufactured excuse he would not-so-humbly have urged Cornelius Fudge to tell the Muggles...

The 'strange light' any of you claim to have seen last night is actually quite explainable. Atmospheric build up of gases combined with the heat of summer consequently ignited an extremely unusual concentration of highly combustible smog particles.

Amusingly enough, Friday the 13th of July was the also clearest night infamously smog-filled London saw all summer.

BREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAKBREAK

Okay well, that's it. Done, completed. Harry Gets Even Part I is finite! But how much does Harry remember? Does he remember anything? Do he and Donnie actually make it back to the past? Stay tuned for the continuation of this story line, "Harry Gets Charged", coming soon to a fanfic website near you! (No, this is not a joke, I'm really writing Part II, and that's what it's called.)

As I type this, I can scarcely believe that nine months have passed since I began this story. OMG! It's a bouncing baby ebook! (passes out firewhisky and cigars all around.)

My initial writing streak started with something Jo Rowling tells all authors, and that's to "write for yourself." That's what I kept doing, and 100,000 words later, due to inspiration by her story, a book is

indeed what you all have read here. As a comparison, that's roughly the same size of Philosopher's Stone.

I have met hundreds of people by my passion for Harry Potter, his universe and the gift of writing within it. Every single one of them has touched me in some way, and I hoped to convey their wonderful friendships through this work.

Beka, Cris, Lisha, Slythy, CHAN, shady, Mike, Jackie, Ashley, Alisa, Firencita, Stephaz, Banneh, Quellie, Emma, Taty, Kitteh, Shaggy, Emrys, Nicceh, Sorcceh, Queeny, Allie, and anybody else whom I pestered about theories, consultation, and the British landscape, lingo, and way of life, I LOVE YOU ALL SO MUCH. I appreciate each of your constant ego boosts and encouragement, AND I COULD NEVER THANK YOU ENOUGH! I dedicate this story to you, as I could never have completed it without you putting up with my incessant complaints, and prodding to read my fic...XD I go by the old adage, "What ego? I'm a writer, I was born without one."

Love Always and Forever,

Raebeth "Jo" Carson ;)

"I'll see ya next time." –LeVar Burton, Reading Rainbow.